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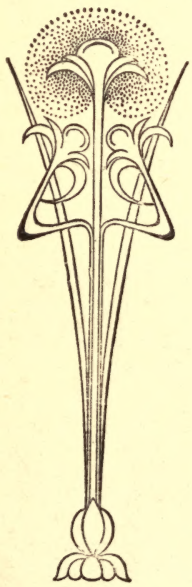
# SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN

# *Saint Mary the Virgin*

*By René-Marie de la Broise*



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# AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IT is not possible to write the life of the Blessed Virgin in the same way that one would write the lives of saints of later times. For these, there are usually available some contemporary memoirs possessing a certain authority, and the carefully collected records which form the evidences for their canonisation. From these sources, few in number and perfectly reliable, their biographies may be readily compiled; and in the case of a popular work it is a sufficient guarantee of trustworthiness if these sources are briefly indicated at the outset.

But in the case of the mother of Jesus, the documents which must be taken into account are both more numerous and more difficult to use properly. For the facts themselves, it is necessary, if one wishes to add anything to the gospel narrative, to gather from early christian literature, evidences of diverse value and not seldom of doubtful value, from which may be adduced, occasionally facts, but more frequently merely conjectures and probabilities. On the other hand, concerning the saintliness of the Virgin Mary and her part in the mystery of our salvation, the exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, theological teaching, and even asceticism,

afford instruction of the highest value, and often furnish facts which are sufficiently guaranteed. To demonstrate how these various documents should be made use of, and to show in what way they have been used, it will be desirable to touch upon some questions of method in this introduction, and also to append numerous notes and references to the text.

I have already attempted an essay on the lines of this introduction,[1] and some day I may perhaps entirely re-write this work in a more critical and exhaustive manner. In the meantime, the limitations imposed by the scope of the series in which this volume appears, though demanding some sacrifices on the part of the author, possess great advantages for a wide circle of readers, in presenting a volume which is short and easy to read. If these advantages help to make the most lovable character of the Virgin Mary better known to a larger number, they will more than compensate for the disadvantages.

There are, as it were, three aspects of the subject, and these three ought to be treated simultaneously and interdependently, because, taken together, they present the true aspect of the character and personality of the Blessed Virgin.

Firstly, there is the historical account of the events of her life. For this, the Gospels, and they alone, afford information supported by the historical authority of contemporary narrative and by the still

[1] *Comment écrire la vie de la Sainte Vierge*, in the *Études* of May 5 and 20, 1898.

higher authority of divinely inspired writings. Besides these, there are the other books of Holy Scripture; and for the events and facts which these do not mention, we have the accounts handed down by the Fathers and early church historians, and the local traditions preserved in the countries in which Mary lived. It is also necessary to take into account the apocryphal gospels, and all that singular literature comprised under the name of Apocrypha, which is so much studied at the present day. Further, one may consult with discrimination the personal revelations of certain saints or of persons who have died in the odour of sanctity. But these various sources will supply us with much less information than it seemed possible to hope for. And, for reasons which would require long and complex analysis, the evidences which are derived from them are not important if taken one by one; even by grouping them we do not always find, but often far otherwise, a tradition uniformly and consistently followed; and upon several questions they present only uncertainty and irreconcilable contradictions. However, to bring out that which may be taken as absolutely certain, that is to say the gospel narrative; to accept some points which the testimony of numerous and weighty authorities renders almost certainties; to choose among divergent opinions and traditions those which seem to be best founded; to take, in certain cases, in default of trustworthy documents, a careful estimate of probabilities, such as what has been thought by those who, according to Catholic tradition, have been best acquainted with Our Lady and have

best spoken of her; to give to each statement, without either strengthening or weakening it, its correct degree of certainty or probability; to avoid the contradictions too frequent among those who accept from every source incompatible data, and, on the contrary, to endeavour to co-ordinate properly the soundest opinions in a consistent biographical method; to renounce, since it is necessary to do so, the satisfying of pious curiosity upon every point, and from fear of affirming that of which one is ignorant, to leave open freely those questions upon which our information is imperfect; and finally, to reserve the right to change one's opinion concerning those points on which more light may yet be thrown —herein, indeed, is comprised that which it is possible to do.

Secondly, it is necessary to give some idea of the mind of Mary and of her inner life. This, perforce, involves a certain amount of conjecture and even the risk of what may be thought temerity. Why wish to divine the thoughts and feelings of a heart which, by reason of its natural qualities and much more by reason of the marvellous operations of grace, so far surpassed ours? Yet, he who does not attempt this, neglects an aspect of the subject which is of much greater importance than questions of chronology or of purely material facts. We humbly recognize that we shall never know all the secrets of that wonderful soul, and that we are ignorant even of the most beautiful aspect of it. But, if the whole truth is beyond our reach, it is nevertheless possible to say, and we may have confidence in so doing,

some things upon this subject which are both beautiful and true. They are to be found in the teachings of theologians, whose persevering reflection has illuminated more than one problem in this higher psychology; in the meditations of the saints, whose minds resemble in some slight degree the mind of Mary, and who were able to realise an approximate idea of her thoughts and affections; and also in the opinion of the Church which, living by the spirit of Jesus, cannot mistake the spirit which animated His mother.

Thirdly, the part assigned to Mary in the divine scheme of the Incarnation and the Redemption must be set forth. And of the three aspects of the subject this one is the best known. For Mary's part in this scheme is revealed to us by God; it pertains to the faith and to the infallible teaching of the Church. In short, Mary is the mother of God, and, if one may so say, as mother of God she can, by the dispensation of Providence and by her free co-operation, be associated in all the mysteries of the incarnate Word. This point, illuminated by the divine light itself, illuminates in its turn all the catholic doctrine concerning Mary. If one should be tempted to find exaggeration in all the great things which the Fathers of the Church and the saints have said of Mary, it must be called to mind that her motherhood is the source and measure of all her privileges and supremacy. Assuredly she is a pure creature, but she remains infinitely inferior to God. And yet, since it has pleased God to become man and to be born of a woman, she who was

chosen to co-operate as the human mother in the great scheme of the Incarnation, finds herself elevated to a rank absolutely apart. Her saintliness surpasses that of all the angels and of all men, because it is the saintliness of the mother of God; and her titles and her privileges, which will be set forth in the course of this work, are incomparable titles and privileges because they pertain to her divine motherhood. As mother of the God incarnate and Redeemer, she is also mother of men, co-redeemer and mediatrix of the world, queen of angels and of the whole universe; the queen and mother who, in the transcendent greatness of her person, in a manner comprises and symbolises all humanity and even the whole of creation, and especially that faithful portion of creation which forms the great Church of the saints and angels.

Among these aspects of the character of the Blessed Virgin which christian thought brings out little by little in an increasingly explicit manner, there is one, especially glorious for her and comforting to us, which I should like to see brought more and more into prominence: that of her association with Jesus in the work of redemption, and consequently as mediatrix with Him, though in an inferior degree, in all the blessings which we receive from heaven. If, in its humble way, this book succeeds in contributing to bring home this doctrine to the souls of men, it will be less unworthy to be dedicated to Our Lady, when, as at this time, we are celebrating the jubilee of the affirmation of the

Immaculate Conception.[1] How could the solemn recognition of one of her privileges be better celebrated than by making this privilege better known?

. . . . . .

N.B.—In quoting from the Fathers, the references are to the text of Migne: PG. = *Patrologia Graeca*; PL. = *Patrologia Latina*.

[1] In order that this volume might appear on the occasion of the jubilee festival [1904] it was necessary to hasten its preparation. I must express my obligations to a friend, who wishes to remain anonymous, for timely co-operation during the last few months. He also takes part in the jubilee celebration, by singing

"Celle dont la beauté n'a jamais été peinte . . ."

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# SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN

## CHAPTER I

### PREDESTINATION—QUEEN OF THE ANGELS AND OF THE WORLD—PROPHETIC PREPARATION

THE first man was created an adult. Might not God have fashioned in the same way the body of His incarnate Son, and, without giving Him parents or ancestors, have introduced Him as perfect man into the world? Perhaps; but if this possibility is within the sphere of the divine omnipotence, it is entirely contrary to the whole scheme of the Incarnation. We were to be redeemed, not by a stranger similar to man, but by a veritable man, sprung of our race, who should be flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. It was not sufficient that the Word should appear clothed in a created nature. He must, in order really to unite creation to God, take upon Himself a body of our substance and of an origin common to humanity. Moreover, He who, in becoming incarnate, would remain the Son of God, could not in the fitness of things have an earthly father. It follows that a mother must be the living bond which should unite Him to the human family. Thus, the incarnation of God becoming veritable man, requires by inherent necessity

the co-operation of two persons; the divine person who takes our nature, and the human person who imparts it to Him. In decreeing that His Son should be made man, God predestined a woman to become the mother of God. Mary, in the divine scheme, is inseparable from Jesus.

Would the Incarnation have formed part of this scheme, even in the hypothesis where man, not having sinned, would have no need of redemption? And, in such case, would the hypostatic union have been made upon our earth and with our nature? Or, perhaps, with the angelic nature, which would not have been an "incarnation," and would not have united the deity with the material world? Or, possibly, in some other planet, with one of those natures which are entirely unknown to us, and of whose actual existence we are uncertain? We cannot say, and it would be rash indeed to inquire into matters which might have had a place in the innumerable possibilities which it has not pleased God to realise. But we do know that, as predetermined by Him from all eternity, and according to the actual history of the world, the Word "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."[1] Whatever may be our place in the whole harmony of creation, He has left the ninety-and-nine other parts of His kingdom, and has descended to earth to seek the sheep which had wilfully strayed.

In decreeing that He should take a mother from this race estranged from God, He at once separated

[1] Nicene Creed. *Cf.* St Thomas, 3ª p., q. i., a. 3.

her morally from the rest of mankind. Having resolved to become incarnate and to suffer to redeem all men, He intended that His mother should first of all receive the full benefit of His redeeming power; He wished not merely to raise her, with others, from the original fall, but to preserve her beforehand and entirely from it; so that, always beautiful and pleasing to the eyes of God, always in brightness, always near Him, she might occupy by His side the place predestined for the mother of God, and participate in all His glory.

But to Jesus Christ is due the pre-eminence in all things. The Incarnation did undoubtedly take place, whatever may have been its motive. For, independently of its object, the incarnation is, by its nature, a marvellous act of grace granted by God of His free bounty to the created world. It perfected the hierarchy of existence, in placing at the summit Him who, in His person as God and man, unites the extremes and directly connects the created with the Creator. And since, in this hierarchy, each grade is allied to God by means of the superior grade, it belongs of right to Him who occupies the highest position to convey to God the homage of the entire world.

Thus through the Word, by whom all was created, does all return again to God. And God, in order to reclaim the world to Himself, directs all things towards the incarnate Word. It is He, King and Mediator of the whole creation, Who is the first and principal object of the Creator's love; all is made for Him; and all, through Him, sing the

praises of the Most High. And Mary, since she is predestined to unite Jesus to the world, is immediately next to Him, and with Him, in the order of the divine mind, the senior of every creature, the queen whose kingdom is in love prepared beforehand, she who should teach the world to glorify its author. Thus we may put into her mouth the verses written concerning Jesus, verses so grand that they seem out of place from the lips of any other :—

> The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way,
> Before His works of old.
> I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,
> Or ever the earth was.
> When there were no depths, I was brought forth ;
> When there were no fountains abounding with water.
> Before the mountains were settled,
> Before the hills was I brought forth :
> While as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields,
> Nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
> When He prepared the heavens, I was there :
> When He set a compass upon the face of the depth :
> When He established the clouds above :
> When He strengthened the fountains of the deep :
> When He gave to the sea His decree,
> That the waters should not pass His commandment :
> When He appointed the foundations of the earth :
> Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him :
> And I was daily His delight,
> Rejoicing always before Him ;
> Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth ;
> And My delights were with the sons of men.
> Now therefore hearken unto Me, O ye children :
> For blessed are they that keep My ways.
> Hear instruction, and be wise,
> And refuse it not.
> Blessed is the man that heareth Me,

Watching daily at My gates,
Waiting at the posts of my doors.
For whoso findeth Me findeth life,
And shall obtain favour of the Lord.[1]

It is above all because He is Mediator of the heavenly favour, that is, of grace, that Jesus—and always with Him, in proportion, His mother—calls to Him the sons of men in order to reunite them to God. And, probably,[2] His relations are the same towards the other beings whom God has raised to the supernatural state, and in particular with the angels, who we certainly know to be raised to this state. Not only has Christ, by affinity with them, a pre-eminence in honour; not only is He their Head by reason of His dignity and marvellous mediation, but probably He is, in a literal sense, their Mediator in the spiritual order; He is their Head, as He is ours, because from Him the divine life descends upon them, as upon us. It is for the love of Jesus, and by reason of His merits—therefore it is also through her who gave Jesus to the world—that all

[1] Proverbs viii. 22-35. *Cf.* Ecclesiasticus xxiv., a parallel passage, which the Church equally applies to the Blessed Virgin.

[2] It is, indeed, a much controverted theological question, whether the angels have received the grace and glory of the divine bounty, without relation to the God-man (*gratia Dei*), or through the love of the Word incarnate and in virtue of His foreknown merits (*gratia Christi*). As a rule those who admit the Incarnation only by reason of sin, hold to the "grace of God" view, while those who admit the Incarnation in any hypothesis adhere to the "grace of Christ." A number however, including myself, do not see any necessary connection between the question of the motive of the Incarnation and that of Christ as the author of supernatural life for the angels. To get some idea of this second question, see Suarez: *de mysteriis Christi*, v. 1, disp. xlii.

have received grace, and that the good attain unto glory. Such appears to be the sublime unity of the divine scheme, to "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him";[1] and such seems to be the full meaning of the saying of Jesus: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."[2]

And likewise, must we not seek in the acceptation or rejection of His Person and of His mission, for the angels as well as for men, the reason of the eternal separation of the good and the bad? Some indications in Holy Scripture concerning the test to which they were certainly subjected, and of the great contest which, at the beginning of the world, arose in heaven, have seemed to bold thinkers to favour this hypothesis.[3] It was the time when, according to the divine order, creation became animate, pure as yet from all sin; the multitude of angels were adorned with the gifts of grace; it was the moment when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."[4] Before calling these celestial spirits to a yet happier state,

[1] Ephesians i. 10. [2] St John xiv. 6.

[3] Study, for example, St John viii. 44, and Revelations xii. These passages are not clear, and in the present position of theology and exegesis, the exposition here presented can only be offered as an hypothesis. See Suarez (with whom I do not entirely agree): *de angelis*, lib. vii., cap. xiii. Also what has been said above respecting the "grace of Christ" bestowed upon the angels, supports independently this hypothesis concerning the purport of their test.

[4] Job xxxviii. 7.

and manifesting Himself to them in the clear vision of His essence, God required of them a token of their fidelity. It is conjectured that He revealed to them His design of uniting the Word to human nature; and, presenting Him to them incarnate in the arms of a woman, commanded them to adore Him. Immediately the peace of heaven was disturbed by a great strife. It was a conflict of free wills tending in opposite directions. The one side, haughtily refusing their homage, separated themselves for ever from God and from His Christ. The others, and these the greater number, turned towards God and His Mediator in humble submission of faith and love; obedient to the Creator, they obtained power over the rebels, and drove them down into the abyss of fire opened up by the first sin. The light chased away the darkness, the face of God was unveiled, and the angels of peace entered into eternal tranquillity and unending love.

The fallen angels became enemies of God and of His works, and in particular of mankind. The man and the woman were, as they themselves had been, adorned with sanctifying grace, and, in order to merit elevation into glory, were placed, as they but lately were, in a state of probation. One of these, perhaps their chief, approached Eve and tempted her. Willingly beguiled, she took the fruit, seeking, in a moment of pride, to attain the divine likeness; Adam, on whom depended the destiny of all mankind, received from his consort the forbidden fruit, and, like her, he ate of it. The first human pair were

vanquished; they lost for themselves and for their descendants, all the privileges which God had so freely bestowed upon them; human nature had fallen, and turned aside from the end for which it had been designed.

Immediately, with the sin, trouble entered into the souls of the guilty pair. When the angel, who talked with them and spoke to them in the name of the Lord, came again in visible form, Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees of the Garden of Eden. Recalled by the divine voice, they heard the sentence upon their disobedience. Unto the tempter, the first malediction; unto the woman, subjection to the man and child-bearing in sorrow; unto the man, hard labour upon the earth, which was henceforth cursed, until the day when he should return unto the dust. But in the same sentence, God included a consoling promise, in words which, handed down by the most ancient traditions of the world and preserved in the narrative of the book of Genesis, contain, as in a marvellously fruitful germ, the whole hope of the human race; that mysterious first prophecy, in the development of which is bound up the history of the Redemption and even the history of the world. Addressing the serpent, whom the devil had made his instrument, and through it the devil himself, God said:—

> I will put enmity between thee and the woman,
> And between thy race and hers;
> Her race shall crush thy head,
> And thou shalt attack its heel.[1]

[1] Genesis iii. 15. The translation here given, after the

Though this oracle was addressed directly to her who up to this time had been called "the woman," and who was "the woman" in this scene of mercy and justice, evidently it also went far beyond her; it is a strife which will be prolonged through all the ages; it is to have a central episode which will sum up the whole, the moment when the head of the dragon shall be crushed; a conqueror shall then appear, manifesting in himself all the forces of humanity, and taking in its name a decisive revenge; and to him will apply in a special manner the name of "race of the woman," a term here purposely used. The sinner of Eden had a glimpse of this consolatory prospect. For the evil one the vision

Hebrew and the ancient versions, is that which probably best responds to the primitive text of the prophecy. Both the text and the symmetrical and poetical order of the words should be studied much more attentively than can be done here. From such a study (to note only this detail: In the first and second clauses, the serpent is put in opposition to the woman, and the race of the woman to the race of the serpent; but in the third, it is not the woman, but her race, which crushes the head of the serpent; a proof that the woman and the race of the woman should fight *conjointly*), it comes out that the woman *and* the race of the woman are *conjointly* enemies of the serpent *and* of the race of the serpent. Thus, Mary and Jesus, the principal objects of the prophecy, are associated together in the struggle and the victory; they form a group as is said further on. The fact that they are united in the strife and the triumph shows that the variant reading of the Vulgate: "The woman shall crush thy head," conforms to the meaning of the prophecy. As to the words "crush" (écraser) and "attack" (attaquer) they represent the same Hebrew verb, used twice; but in French, as in the Vulgate and in most other versions, it is difficult to find a single word which represents the dissimilar attitudes of the combatants.

was plainer, and it was terrible; he it was who had instigated the revolt on the threshold of heaven, but this time the woman and the God-man appear menacing him, and ready to take vengeance upon him for the whole human race.

It is, in truth, this group of Mary and Jesus, foreshadowed in the distance by the prophecy, which forms the principal object in it. It stands in contrast to the vanquished group, which, in the scene of the fall, occupies the chief place—the man and the woman having made alliance with the rebel angel, have become slaves to sin, to concupiscence, and to death. The enmity established by God between the devil and the victorious group will be total and absolute. Pure from all sin, free from every earthly imperfection, triumphant over death, they will destroy the work of Satan and will crush his head. Alone, the sin of Adam, chief of the human race, has lost all his sons; but near him he retains the woman, through whom the ruin had commenced, and who offered the fruit of death. Alone, Christ will save us; but near Him, Mary will have her place, beginning the work of our salvation, and offering to us the fruit of life. From Adam and Eve shall spring all the generations of mankind, but the nature which they will transmit to the multitude of their sons will be estranged from God, and will carry to the end of time the stigma of their fault. Towards Jesus and Mary will turn all those who are born again in grace; and from them will proceed the source of life, both for those who have gone before them as well as for those who shall come

after them. It was after the sin, and when she began to give sons to Adam according to nature, that the woman received the name of Eve, which signifies "life," "because she was the mother of all living."[1] Alas! in giving them earthly life, she brought them forth unto death. Mary, glorious antithesis of the first woman, will be the new Eve and "the mother of all living," because she will give to all, participation in the divine and immortal life of Jesus. "The race of the woman" indicates not only Jesus, but includes, with Him and in Him, all the sons of the woman, who, through the new Eve, shall have received this spiritual life.[2] Through the ages and throughout the world, all these will fight against the evil one and against his race who are enemies of God, whether angels or men. They may receive some wounds, for the enemy will be able to persecute the mystical body of Christ, as he was able to crucify His mortal body. They are the blows which the foiled serpent aims at the heel of his conqueror. But Jesus and the woman will associate these in their victory, and, triumphant over the world and over hell, over persecution and over death, they will smite with irremediable blow the head of the enemy.

When the human family had multiplied, and were divided "by tribes, by languages, and by nations," the woman from whom should proceed the author of a new order of things remained, though vaguely, the expectation of all people. But whilst, among

[1] Genesis iii. 20. [2] *Cf.* Revelations xii. 17.

the greater part, the tradition became obscured and mingled with fable, there was one quarter at least in which it grew gradually clearer and more defined. In renewing to Abraham the ancient prophecy, God announced to him that from him should proceed that expected seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. In making covenant with the race of Abraham and Jacob, He constituted this chosen people the confidant and heir of His promises and the subject of His marvellous acts. All the sayings of the Lord of Israel tended towards the announcement of the kingdom which was to come, a kingdom which should have no limits and no end; His miracles usually symbolised some aspect of the person of the Messiah or of His reign; and His many interventions to deliver His people foreshadowed the final deliverance through the Redemption.

From the days of Moses down to the time of Zedekiah, the children of Israel had with them a symbol of the presence of God and a pledge of His protection. The ark, carried before the people whilst on the march or on going into battle, at other times resting in the Tabernacle, or later in the Holy of Holies, was not made merely to contain the Tables of the Law; it was the throne of Jehovah. Above the mercy-seat, the table of gold which formed the lid of the ark, and between the wings of the two cherubim, was the Shechinah. There the Lord descended invisible, either to watch over His people, or to converse with Moses, or to communicate His instructions to the successors of Aaron; and during the sojourn in the desert, or

later, upon solemn occasions, a cloud descended, enveloping in its shadow the ark and the Tabernacle: this was the sign of the presence of God. "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee,"[1] said the angel to Mary, at the moment when there descended upon her the Word, the power of God, the Deliverer and Guide of the new people in their march towards the true land of promise. This allusion by Gabriel to the recognised sign of the divine manifestations seems to confirm, even in the name of God Himself, the symbolism which sees in Mary "the ark of the covenant," and "the Tabernacle of the living God."

In the eighth century before our era, the golden age of Hebrew prophecy, the Lord added this feature to the promise of the expected woman, that she should as a virgin give the Saviour to the world.

In the reign of the impious Ahaz, and in the year 735, Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, King of Israel, made alliance against Judah. Ahaz had already been conquered by each of these. Having united their forces they advanced towards Jerusalem, with the object of taking the city, of dethroning Ahaz, and of replacing him by a Syriac prince, "the son of Tabeal." When the news of this came to Ahaz, "his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Then the Lord commanded Isaiah to go forth to meet Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field"; and in a message delivered in the

[1] St Luke i. 35. See Knabenbauer upon this passage.

name of God, the prophet exhorted the king not to fear "the two tails of these smoking firebrands," but much more than the two allied kings is to be feared infidelity towards the God of Israel. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

To the encouragements of the prophet, to his exhortation to preserve that faith and confidence in the true God, which are the conditions of safety, Ahaz responded not. His hope was in the gods of the Syrians, his enemies, and in the help, dearly bought, of Nineveh and Tiglath-Pileser. Then the Lord spoke again by the mouth of Isaiah, "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above."[1] Ahaz, veiling his irreligion under a hypocritical semblance of respect, answered, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." Then said Isaiah:—

"Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,[2] and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."[3]

[1] "Ask a sign either out of hell or even from heaven."

[2] [The author renders this passage from the Hebrew as "Voici la Vierge concevant et enfantant un Fils."—*Translator's note.*]

[3] Isaiah vii. 1-16. Catholic interpreters, though fully in harmony concerning the substance of the prophecy that "the

Ahaz refused to ask a sign of the deliverance of Jerusalem, but God, whose purpose and goodness was not turned aside by the impiety of the king, showed him afar off the great sign of His mercy, a token for heaven, for earth, and for hell, a type of all deliverances and all redemptions, His Word becoming "God with us,"—which is the significance of the name *'Immanu-El*—through the medium of a virgin mother. With the coming of the Messiah, was foreshadowed one of His characteristics, the poverty of His childhood; of the promised scion of the race of David it was said, "butter and honey shall He eat."[1] At the same time that He illuminated the sadness of the present by this ray of Messianic hope, God confirmed this distant promise by a more definite announcement, and by another immediate sign of the approaching deliverance. Before the time that the Child should be able to distinguish between good and bad, war will have rendered desolate both Syria and Samaria, the lands of the two kings feared by Ahaz; and to indicate to all men the limit of this time, another child shall be born, son of Isaiah himself and symbol of Emmanuel, whose prophetic name will betoken that the enemies' country shall be given up to pillage.[2]

virgin shall bear Emmanuel," differ upon some details of translation or interpretation. MM. Huyghe and Alfred Durand have lately advanced an attractive exposition, which M. Condamin has provisionally adopted in his *Isaiah*, and which I should be inclined to accept, if it is found to stand the test of time.

[1] An expression which indicates the impoverished living of a devastated country. *Cf.* verse 22 of the same chapter.

[2] Isaiah viii. 1-4.

Isaiah does not say, "*A* virgin shall bring forth"; he foretells "*the* virgin conceiving and bringing into the world" the desired Son. Is this in order to mark specially the singularity of this marvel? Is it to heighten the unique and incommunicable glory of this mother, whose distinctive name through all ages will be "the Virgin"? Or may it be—and this second interpretation is perhaps true, as well as the first — that what he now repeated with divine authority was already known through the former prophecies, and that, before his time, "the virgin who brings forth," designated the mother of the Messiah? In any case, whether the effect of a previous prophecy, or in consequence of this prophecy of Isaiah, we see that henceforth they spoke of this most blessed woman as of a known person. For Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah, from the way in which he refers to her, also implies that she is already present to the minds of his hearers. After having prophesied the birth of the Messiah at Bethlehem, he adds, without further explanation, that God will deliver over his people to oppression "until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth."[1]

She it is again whom, according to the commonly accepted interpretation, Jeremiah appears to describe when, a century-and-a-half later, he announces the return from the exile. The stanzas in which he urges his brethren to turn again towards Jerusalem abound in allusions to the Messianic blessings, which they will find after the return to

[1] Micah v. 3.

their country. One of these stanzas gives them even a glimpse of the mystery of the Incarnation:—

> Set thee up waymarks,
> Make thee high heaps:[1]
> Set thine heart toward the highway,
> Even the way which thou wentest:
>
> Turn again, O virgin of Israel,
> Turn again to these thy cities.
> How long wilt thou go about,
> O thou backsliding daughter?
> For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth,
> A woman shall compass a man.[2]

Mary is also prophetically sung in all the passages of the Old Testament which celebrate the love of God for His creatures, and His alliance with each faithful soul or with the assembly of the righteous. The mother of God and of men symbolises and comprehends in herself all the faithful part of mankind; and it follows that the emblems of the Church and the divine revelations relative to the Church refer to her, in the same way that what is said of a kingdom refers to the queen of the kingdom. She is the true Sion, the city of God, of which so many "glorious things are spoken."[3]

The union of the Lord with Jerusalem and with the chosen people is often, in Holy Scripture, compared to a marriage. And this comparison, since the divine condescension permits its application to the creature, applies in a particular manner to Mary. She is the bride; for, if this title belongs to

[1] To mark the way of the return. [2] Jeremiah xxxi. 21, 22.
[3] Psalm lxxxvii. 3.

each righteous soul, it belongs above all to the most saintly of all souls. She is the bride; for, if this name is given to the Church and to the company of the saints, she has the highest right to it who is the queen and the ideal type of both the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. She is, in short, the bride, by a title proper to her alone and untransferable; for, before giving Himself to mankind and to the Church, God, in incarnating Himself in her womb, united Himself to her in a special manner in the mystery of an ineffable union.

For these three reasons, the Canticles of the divine betrothal are pre-eminently the song of the union of God with Mary. And it is in no mystic or far-fetched sense that it applies to her. Literally, the poem sings in general terms the love of God for mankind; His love for the Virgin thus forms an integral part of its literal meaning, and likewise, in virtue of the supremacy of Mary, it becomes the most important part of it.[1] There is room, under the ample veil of allegory, for other real persons, as for any of the righteous souls, or of the mystics, or for the synagogue, or the Church, to whom the title of bride belongs in varying degree; and to these may be applied, besides the passages relative to the divine union, those which mark some imperfection in the bride, or suggest some reproach by the spouse. To Mary more than to any other applies

[1] At least, in relation to its application to other pure souls. For its signification of the espousal of human nature by Christ in the Incarnation, must take precedence of its application to the Virgin Mary.

all that which expresses beauty without blemish, unfaltering love, and unclouded intimacy:—

> Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair;
> Thou hast doves' eyes . . .
> Thou art all fair, my love;
> And there is no spot in thee.[1]

Before her, all the others are eclipsed:—

> As the lily among thorns,
> So is my love among the daughters.[2]

Her queenly beauty is majestic and powerful like unto armies and great cities:—

> Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,
> Comely as Jerusalem,
> Terrible as an army with banners.[3]

It is a beauty possessing influence even upon the heart of God. For to Mary apply all those passages in which the ardour of a reciprocal love is so vividly depicted. From her first words, as the Immaculate, from the first act of her heart, the bride desires from her spouse "the kisses of his mouth"; she seeks him at mid-day where he feeds and rests his flock; she adjures those who have seen him to tell him of her love; if she sleeps—and this, of Mary, is probably literally true—her heart wakes in thinking of him.[4] The spouse declares that his heart is ravished;[5] and to the longings of his well-beloved he responds by giving himself to her. Mary, speak-

[1] Song of Solomon i. 15; iv. 7.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 2.
[3] *Ibid.* vi. 4 (Vulg. vi. 3).
[4] *Ibid.* i. 1, 7; v. 8; v. 2.
[5] *Ibid.* iv. 9.

ing of Him who reposes in the bosom of the Father in heaven, can say:—

> While the king was at his repose,
> My spikenard sent forth the odour thereof.[1]

Attracted by her charm and by her virtues, the king communes with her in a special and unique intimacy, in which no other is able to participate. Mary is to him, "a garden inclosed . . . a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."[2] She says again, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."[3] And he, comparing her to all others who have been lifted up towards God, declares her to be the foremost, or rather, so far does she surpass the others, the only one among the daughters of men:—

> My dove, my undefiled is but one;
> She is the only one of her mother,
> She is the choice one of her that bare her.[4]

Beside the cycle of divine love, the cycle of wisdom occupies a prominent place in the poetry of the Old Testament. Magnificently sung from the days of Solomon down to the limits of the Asmonean period, wisdom is by turns an attribute of God, a virtue of the righteous soul, a living person. In its most general conception it is something of the divine nature which inclines towards human nature; the crowning gift, which in uniting itself to man, unites him to God. Nothing could better correspond to the idea of the Word

[1] Song of Solomon, i. 11 (Vulg.); A.V., i. 12.
[2] *Ibid.* iv. 12. [3] *Ibid.* vi. 3 (Vulg. vi. 2); *cf.* vii. 10.
[4] *Ibid.* vi. 9 (Vulg. vi. 8).

made flesh, and in those passages in which the concrete and precise attributes are those of a person rather than of abstract wisdom, it is He, without doubt, that we ought to recognise. But Mary is so like unto Jesus! Even if it is difficult to maintain that she ought to be included with Him in the fulness of the literal sense, at least there is good and sufficient warrant for applying to her those traits which are proper to her also, and, after Jesus, to her alone: incomparable greatness of character and of holiness, pre-eminence in the divine scheme and in the government of the world, special dominion in Sion and in the heritage of the Lord, that is, in the souls of the righteous and in the Church, the function of universal mediatrix of grace and of all blessings.

I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus,
And as a cypress tree upon the mountains of Hermon.
I was exalted like a palm tree in Engaddi,
And as a rose plant in Jericho,
As a fair olive tree in a pleasant field,
And grew up as a plane tree by the water.

I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aspalathus,
And I yielded a pleasant odour like the best myrrh,
As galbanum, and onyx, and sweet storax,
And as the fume of frankincense in the tabernacle.
As the turpentine tree I stretched out my branches,
And my branches are the branches of honour and grace.
As the vine brought I forth pleasant savour,
And my flowers are the fruit of honour and riches.

Come unto me, all ye that be desirous of me,
And fill yourselves with my fruits.
For my memorial is sweeter than honey,
And mine inheritance than the honey-comb.

They that eat me shall yet be hungry,
And they that drink me shall yet be thirsty.
He that obeyeth me shall never be confounded,
And they that work by me shall not do amiss.[1]

Several times are these glorious promises renewed, and these pressing appeals to accept the blessings which wisdom will bestow upon all are repeated:—

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom:
I am understanding; I have strength.
By me kings reign,
And princes decree justice.
By me princes rule,
And nobles, even all the judges of the earth.
I love them that love me;
And those that seek me early shall find me.
Riches and honour are with me;
Yea, durable riches and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold;
And my revenue than choice silver.
I lead in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of judgment:
That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance;
And I will fill their treasures.[2]

. . . . . .

Wisdom hath builded her house,
She hath hewn out her seven pillars:
She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine;
She hath also furnished her table.
She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth
Upon the highest places of the city,
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither:

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[1] Ecclesiasticus xxiv. 13-22. *Cf.* Vulgate xxiv. 17-32; also the Greek text given by Knabenbauer in his commentary. In the construction of this text, however, several points remain doubtful.

[2] Proverbs viii. 14-21.

> As for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
> Come, eat of my bread,
> And drink of the wine which I have mingled.[1]

Yes, truly, and even while they sing of the eternal Wisdom begotten of the Father, and prophesy His beneficent coming upon earth, the Hebrew poets call up at the same time—at least in the minds of christian readers—another image. It is, as in a celestial vision, the distant form of the Virgin mother. Her Son is with her, He is inseparable from her, clasped in her arms; the sweet seriousness, which makes her appear as wise as wisdom itself, is a likeness to her Son; the majestic lustre which causes her to be venerated beyond all that which has ever been revered under the name of ancient wisdom, is her predestination to become the mother of the Redeemer, and a reflection from the eternity of her Son. This Son she presents to men, desirous of giving all to them through Him, desirous above all of giving herself to Him; and silently her counsels descend into the heart. She addresses herself in the first place to the weak and the humble; but she appeals to all who are willing to become her humble disciples. She calls upon them to renounce the past; she offers to them lasting gifts which bring with them a joy that never palls; above all, she promises them "the blessed fruit of her womb." She instructs not only by her advice; her words have all the insight of those of a mother; she touches, encourages, and attracts. Her holiness

[1] Proverbs ix. 1-5. In addition to the passages here cited, see *The Book of Wisdom*, especially chapters vi., vii., viii.

charms like a perfume; the approach to her is easy; she bestows her loving-kindness and her aid in response to even the least homage. She is a living and smiling invitation to virtue. Around her, one already foresees the whole company of the elect. Distant or near, feeling her influence from afar or kneeling at her feet, all will receive through her the celestial gift; sinners rescued by at last yielding to her admonitions, innocents sanctified through the eager acceptance of all her counsels; all those who shall find her, shall find life, and shall partake of the grace which proceeds from the Lord.

In yet many other Biblical characters we see Mary reflected. The heroines of Israel cannot for saintliness be compared with her; but at least, in so far as they were deliverers of their people, they resemble the woman victorious over the serpent and co-redeemer of the world. Such is Jael the Kenite, piercing the temples of Sisera; Judith who, triumphing over Holofernes, became "the exaltation of Jerusalem . . . the great glory of Israel . . . the great rejoicing of our nation";[1] Esther whose charm won the heart of Ahasuerus and procured the deliverance of her race.

Even things also in Holy Scripture speak of Mary, and prefigure her in their own manner. She is the beautiful rainbow in the heavens, stretched out by the hand of the Most High, which recalls to God's remembrance His merciful covenant with all flesh. She is the mysterious ladder shown to Jacob, the steps of which unite earth to heaven; its summit

[1] Judith xv. 9.

reaches up to God Who promises blessings to all the tribes of the earth; by it the angels ascend, carrying our worship and our prayers; by it they descend again, bearing the mercies and the gifts of the Word incarnate. She is the great vision of Horeb, the burning bush, where God manifested Himself to Moses for the deliverance of Israel; for, "in this bush which the flames consume not, we recognise thy marvellously preserved virginity, oh, mother of God!"[1] She is that fleece, by which Gideon asked of the Lord two signs of the success of his mission; the first night, in the midst of the dry threshing-floor, the fleece was wet with dew; the second night, the threshing-floor was covered with dew, while the fleece remained dry. So, in the midst of the arid earth, Mary alone receives the dew of heaven; and so, in the universal sinfulness, she alone remains immaculate.[2] She is, after the long years of drought, that cloud, small as a footprint, which the servant of Elijah saw from the top of Mount Carmel, rising out of the sea: "Go up," said the prophet, "say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not."[3] In like manner does the first appearance of Mary bring again hope and joy into the world; the heavens are no longer like

[1] Office of the Circumcision and of the Vigil of Epiphany, third antiphon at Laudes.

[2] Dum torret arescens humus,
Tu rore sola spargeris;
Tellure circum rorida,
Intacta sola permanes.
Office of Our Lady of Lourdes, hymn at Laudes.

[3] 1 Kings xviii. 44.

brass, and the mercies which they shed upon the earth restores its fruitfulness. Finally she, the Virgin Mary, is the eastern gate of the Temple which Ezekiel saw in his vision of the restored city. The gate which is open only to the Lord when His glory manifests itself in the Temple, and through which He makes His entry by the way of the east. From that time, "this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it."[1] Beautiful image of her through whom the Word has made His entry into the world, and whom the divine visitation has for ever consecrated to ineffable purity.

The reason for which the eastern door remains reserved to God, applies, on very good grounds, to the perpetual virginity of Mary; and indeed, this dogma is, by inference, implied in the text itself. For, as we have already recalled to mind, the Holy Spirit appears, according to the words of the Gospel, to have desired to render the ark and the Tabernacle symbols of Mary. As to the other figures, only by a long and very delicate study would it be possible to distinguish the case in which the symbolism, which forms part of the typical sense, is inspired by God Himself, from the case in which it is the result of the human mind endeavouring to observe in the narratives and scenes of Holy Scripture, analogies to the life and virtues of Our Lady. Besides, even in this second case, the intellect of man does but conform to the divine purpose. "The Holy Spirit,

[1] Ezekiel xliv. 2.

who has from all eternity foreseen all the meanings which could be ascribed to Holy Scripture, has also always approved those which are good and which tend to edify the children of God."[1] If Jesus and Mary are the central objects of all creation, much more are they also the central objects of all the Sacred Books; and it pleases God to see the mind and heart of man discover in each detail of the inspired writings, the principal objects of His eternal love.

[1] Bossuet: *Explication de l'Apocalypse*; preface, § iv.

## CHAPTER II

### HER SURROUNDINGS AND FAMILY—THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION—HER BIRTH (ABOUT THE YEAR 22 B.C.)[1]

AT the same time that the inspired Scriptures were announcing, or in various ways prefiguring the Saviour and His mother, the modes of thought and the hearts of the people were becoming, little by little, more attuned to that moment in which God had decided to accomplish His great work. Evil had increased to such a fearful extent as to threaten the reprobation of Israel, but at the same time good had increased in many souls, and one could see in preparation the surroundings in which the Messiah should be born and gather together His first disciples.

Herod had taken possession of Jerusalem in the year 37, and was ruling over the whole land of Israel. This "half-jew," who came from Idumea, reigned with cruelty and magnificence—steeped in blood by domestic quarrels and by the revolts of his subjects; covering Judea with profane monuments, celebrating the games, and rebuilding the temple of Apollo at

[1] This approximate date is based upon two chronological considerations: Mary appears to have been about fifteen years old at the time when she became the mother of God, and, according to the most probable calculation, the Incarnation took place in the year 6 B.C., or thereabouts.

Rhodes, in order to render his name illustrious in the Græco-Roman world; respecting at the same time the customs of the Jews, zealous for the splendour of the ceremonies and festivals of the true God, and reconstructing on a larger and more magnificent scale the temple of Zerubbabel.

More and more did the scandals multiply, further did the Hellenic civilisation spread, and more and more did the Pharisee separate himself from impure contact and obstinately entrench himself behind the "pale of the Law," fortified with new precepts and scrupulous observances. The Sadducee, on the other hand, friend of secular knowledge, of opulence, and of easy life, showed himself tolerant of the dangerous novelties, and flattering towards human authority. The Pharisee, by pride, narrowness of mind, and hardness of heart, corrupted a doctrine almost entirely orthodox. The Sadducee raised his thoughts no higher than earth, and of the religion of Israel, observed only a certain number of external practices.

But happily, the nation was not entirely composed of these two rival sects. Besides these, there was a large body of the people who remained faithful to the grace of divine election. They were to be found in the highest ranks of society, and in the religious community grouped round the Temple; among the priests, as Zacharias, and among the elect, as Simeon and the prophetess Anna; in the towns and in the country, among the crowds, such as those who ere long followed Jesus, for ever priests to glorify God through His teaching and His miracles; and even in

uncultivated Galilee were to be found upright and loyal natures, like Nathanael of Cana, the "Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"[1]

Moreover, the faithful among the Jews of that time exhibited certain characteristics which already tended towards christianity. "A man of understanding is faithful to the law of God, and the law is faithful to him."[2] This Law had been given to a people still in childhood, as a "tutor" and as a "governor," to fashion them little by little, and to prepare them for manhood in Christ;[3] and it must therefore, in submissive souls, have attained that end.

Its ancient teachings were now far better comprehended than they had been practised by a long succession of generations; and, in the new divine words with which the sacred writings were enriched after the exile, it represented more and more the doctrine of the true Master, who for so long a time had been promised and awaited. Underlying the law of fear, one became conscious of the beginnings of the law of love; the intercourse between the creature and the Creator became more trustful and free, and a filial spirit was awakening in the hearts of the people.

Even outward circumstances came to the aid of written revelation. These also helped in forming

[1] St John i. 47.

[2] Ecclesiasticus xxxiii. 3. This version differs from the recently recovered Hebrew text, in which, however, this verse is incomplete.

[3] Galatians iv. 2; iii. 24, 25.

the minds of the people, and the best among the Jews had, even unconsciously, gathered divine teachings from them. Exiled or invaded, they had learned to separate themselves, especially in heart, from the obdurate heathen, and to give, in their sympathies and actually in the community of their religious life, a larger place to the stranger "fearing God."

Assuredly, the old covenant brought nothing to perfection; those outlines of virtues and of christian sentiments would never have ended in christianity itself, without the personal revelation of Jesus; and the teaching and example of the Master were, above all, needed to detach man from the good things of this world and to teach him self-denial and suffering; in a word, to give him the knowledge of the cross. This great innovation had, however, been foreshadowed and prepared for. For instance, in the Old Testament, the law of trial imposed upon the just, shows that it was not altogether unknown, and it revealed itself more clearly as the time of the Redemption drew nigh. The book of *Tobias* gives in appropiate words the lesson underlying the poetical discourse of Job: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."[1] The *Book of Wisdom* condemns the epicurean, whose ambitions are limited to the enjoyment of this present life; and it glorifies the just, dead in torments with a hope full of immortality.[2] And, in fact, at the time when the last books of Wisdom were written, the choice

[1] *Tobias*, xii. 13. [2] *Book of Wisdom*, iii. 4.

between the material good of this world and the blessings of the future life was placed no longer before one or two chosen persons, but before the multitude; the kings of Egypt and of Syria were beginning the era of persecution, and the synagogue, symbol of the christian church, offered to God the first-fruits of the martyrs. Then awoke a more lively faith in the resurrection and in immortality. In the presence of torments and imminent death, these great realities beyond the tomb seemed also to draw nearer; the hope of eternal life was never more firmly held than before the tribunal of Antiochus. It is true that at this time no clear idea of that "kingdom of heaven" which Jesus came to preach had been set forth; but righteous souls were prepared to understand it without too much wonderment, and to accept it without much opposition.

It was very fitting that the family destined to give the Messiah to the world should belong to this faithful section of the Jewish people. The few names and the little information that we are able to gather, harmonise well with the order of events. And the initiation of these descendants of the royal line into the evangelical law of poverty and detachment from the earth, had been assisted by the loss of wealth and worldly position.

The Gospel speaks of two branches of the house of David. It makes them both unite in "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus";[1] but

[1] St Matthew i. 16.

Mary herself most certainly came of the race of kings.[1] It is not at all probable that she was descended from a third genealogical line, unknown to us; but rather, from the testimony of antiquity, though somewhat confused and not altogether in accord, it would seem that she was related to Saint Joseph himself, and that by following the lists of St Matthew and St Luke we are brought very near her.[2] One of these two branches sprang from Nathan, son of David, who is named without any further details in the Book of Kings. It appears to be mentioned by Zechariah the prophet, as by right of the family of the Messiah;[3] but on the whole it always remained in almost complete obscurity. The other branch, on the contrary, had supplied during four and a half centuries the whole series of the nineteen kings of Judah, from David down to Jehoiachin; after which, in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah

[1] St Luke i. 32; Romans i. 3; 2 Timothy ii. 8; and unanimous tradition.

[2] According to several commentators, the list of St Luke brings us not only near to the Holy Virgin but quite down to her. Heli (St Luke iii. 23) may be Joachim, father of Mary and father-in-law of Saint Joseph (Heli is an apocope of Heliakim, and Heliakim is the same name as Joachim, the former formed from Elohim and the latter from Yahveh). This opinion possesses a certain amount of probability. The other, however, which sees in the two lists two genealogies of Saint Joseph is more widely accepted and better supported. *Cf.* the article "Généalogie de Jésus-Christ," by M. F. Prat in the *Dictionnaire de la Bible.* Upon all these questions see the articles Généalogie and Lévirat by the same author in the *Dictionnaire.*

[3] Zechariah xii. 12. See Knabenbauer's commentary upon this passage.

addressed to the latter prince, it lost the sceptre for ever.[1] During the exile, the two branches drew near again for a moment, and, in the person of Zerubbabel, who seems to have belonged to both, they sent forth a last radiance. Then for five centuries the lineage of the two sons of Zerubbabel, Abiud and Rhesa, presents only names totally unknown, down to Jacob, father according to nature, and Heli, father according to the law,[2] of Joseph the carpenter. In overthrowing the earthly throne of Judah, God had not forgotten His promises and ever faithful mercies to David; but, in fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, the blessed seed of Jesse sprung silently, unnoticed, and mysteriously from the roots of a fallen stem.[3]

It was at Bethlehem that Jesse dwelt, and where David was born. Some ancient traditions also place at Bethlehem the ancestors of Saint Joseph, and represent a part of the royal family as always inhabiting the land of Judah. Other remnants of the illustrious race had gone, perhaps to hide their humiliation, to live in far-off Galilee. It is difficult to decide to which of the two groups the parents of Mary belonged; whether they lived at

[1] Jeremiah xxii. 30.

[2] In the most commonly accepted explanation, this law is that of the levirate, which occurs several times in the genealogy of our Saviour. Heli and Jacob were two brothers, born of the same mother. Heli having died without children, Jacob espoused his widow—this is the levirate marriage—in order "to raise up seed to his brother." This offspring was Joseph, who, born of Jacob, was legally regarded as the son of Heli.

[3] Isaiah xi. 1 (note the Hebrew text).

Jerusalem in the house which is attributed to them, on the north of the Temple and near to the *piscine probatique*, or whether they were settled at Nazareth. Perhaps the preference may be given to Jerusalem, while remembering at the same time that there were at Nazareth some relatives of the holy family.[1]

This holy family presents itself to us like an ancient picture of which only vestiges have survived the ravages of time. In it, some faces and some figures are well preserved, others are half effaced, and between the fragments of the group there are lacunæ too great for it to be possible to discern clearly the connection between the various persons.

Of all the relatives who surrounded Mary at her entrance into the world, Zacharias and Elisabeth are known with most certainty. The fact that Elisabeth, daughter of Aaron, was a cousin of Mary,[2] proves that, as has already been shown, there had been alliance between the royal and the priestly families. Perhaps, though this hypothesis is not proved and the tradition is obscure, it was Mary's mother who belonged to the consecrated race; and thus,

[1] Upon the question of the birth-place of Mary, opinion is divided between Jerusalem and Nazareth. Some have also suggested Bethlehem, and others Sepphoris. A certain number think that Mary's parents may have possessed two houses, or at least that they may have lived successively at Nazareth and Jerusalem. Without having the riches which legend attributes to them, it is possible that Anne and Joachim may have possessed two modest dwellings, or have acquired them successively ; I do not know, however, whether these theories are well founded.

[2] St Luke i. 5, 36.

in accordance with the providential fitness of things, the Virgin mother and the Messiah took their origin from the royal blood mingled by alliance with that of priests.

Yet nearer to Our Lady, the Gospel places that other Mary who was the wife of Cleophas [1] and the mother of James, Joseph, Simon and Jude.[2] She was older than Mary, even by several years, at least if we may believe that her son Saint James the Less was ninety-six years old when he was martyred under Nero. In spite of the difference in age, she is especially named as "the sister" [3] of Mary, in the same way that her sons are the "brothers of the Lord." This close relationship was doubtless due to her marriage with Cleophas. For this Cleophas, according to a well-founded opinion,[4] was the brother, probably the elder brother, of Saint Joseph.[5] In this case the union of the two families would be still further strengthened by the marriage of Our Lady; the two Marys would thus become sisters-in-law,

[1] The opinion here expressed supposes that Cleophas, or rather Clopas (St John xix. 25) is the same as Alphaeus (St Matthew x. 3, and elsewhere). See *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, *s.v.* Alphée and Cléophas, 2.

[2] *Cf.* St Matthew xiii. 55, and xxvii. 56; St Mark xv. 40; Jude i. 1.

[3] It seems that this word should not be taken in its literal sense, for it is very difficult to believe that Anne and Joachim may have had an elder daughter previous to the Holy Virgin.

[4] This is based principally on the testimony of Hegesippus, cited by Eusebius: *historia ecclesiastica*, III. xi. (PG., xx. 248).

[5] Cleophas may have been born of a first marriage of Jacob. Afterwards, the latter, having become a widower, would have espoused the widow of Heli. See note 2, p. 34.

and the sons of Cleophas would legally be cousins-german of Jesus, which corresponds very well with the relationships suggested in the Gospel.

The younger brother of Cleophas, Saint Joseph, thenceforward himself becomes part of the holy family. Solely desirous of rendering his life pleasing to God, the humble young man awaited in silence the time of the fulfilment of the intentions of Providence.

At length, bending over the cradle of Mary, appear two reverent and gentle faces, those of the two holy persons always designated under the names of Joachim and Anne. These two were, doubtless, such as they are represented in ancient legends, the imaginative episodes of which may retain something of their true appearance. Full of gravity, goodness, charity to the poor, love of God, and reverence for His Temple, they came as near to christianity as it was possible for the saints of the Old Testament to attain. In their virtues they far surpassed the little that is said of them by the old narrators, who were not always men of a very delicate spirituality. But besides these narratives, the exact amount of truth in which it is difficult to determine, we may be assured of their great saintliness because of its propriety, or rather its necessity, in their high calling, and by the belief of the whole christian church.[1]

[1] It is well known that numerous details concerning Anne and Joachim, their virtues, their prayers, their desire to have a child, their vow to consecrate it to the Temple, and the announcement of the birth of Mary made to them by an angel, are to be found in the apocryphal gospels. See, for example, Tischendorf's

Practically, all generations have repeated their praises in these words, which express far more than a long narration, "By their fruits ye shall know them."[1] Sometimes, it is true, the righteous are born of sinful parents, and, even in the genealogy of Jesus, there are several names which awaken sad memories. But the contrast between the errors of humanity and the redeeming purity of the Saviour and His mother, beautiful and consoling as it appears in the case of the Holy Family and their remote ancestors, would seem very shocking if it occurred in connection with their immediate relatives. It is an affecting sight to see sinners prostrated before the sacred Host, but the priest who handles it, and the vessel which receives it must be pure and holy. Thus, the nearer the promised Son of David approached, the more was it necessary to purify the ancient blood of the kings of Judah. At the blissful end of that long series of generations, the divine motherhood exacted pre-eminent holiness in Mary, and that holiness, radiant in the mystery of her conception, demanded a superabundant propor-

edition of the *Protevangelium of James*, and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, or the *Gospel of the nativity of Mary and the infancy of the Saviour* (often cited wrongly under the name of St Jerome). The narratives of the oriental Fathers, which appeared only at a comparatively late epoch, and seem to be derived mainly from the apocryphal books, are of no value in support of the truth of these particulars. Among all these details, some bear on the face of them the stamp of falsehood; others may possibly be true, and it would be hazardous to deny them; but also it is very difficult to decide what is actual history, and to separate it with certainty from legendary additions.

[1] St Matthew vii. 20.

tion of virtues in those from whom she derived her most pure origin. The blessed Anne had received the grace befitting her who should bring into the world the mother of the Word incarnate; while Joachim had been chosen in preference to all the other saints, to become the father of the mother of the Son of God.[1] By these things, then, we may judge of the merits of these two saints. "O blessed couple, Joachim and Anne—unto you is all creation laid under debt, since through you creation hath offered to the Creator the noblest of gifts, namely, that chaste mother, who alone was worthy of the Creator . . . O blessed couple, Joachim and Anne, most truly immaculate! . . . That that which should be born of you might be worthy and well-pleasing in the sight of God, ye ordered your own lives by rule."[2]

On the same grounds of appropriateness we are assured that at an advanced age Anne and Joachim obtained by prayer the birth of their blessed child. This circumstance well accords with the general harmony of the mystery. It is thought by saints and theologians that the Immaculate Conception was a wholly divine work, and that nature had in it the least possible part; its only mission was to supply the slight foundation necessary for the spiritual grace and wonders.

[1] This is said by the Church in the prayers for the feast of St Anne (July 26), and of St Joachim (the Sunday in the octave of the Assumption).

[2] St John of Damascus: *sermo in nativitatem B. V. Mariae* (PG., xcvi., 664 and 668). Quoted in the fifth and sixth lessons at Matins of the feast of St Joachim.

In the case of all others (who, being born of Adam, follow ordinary laws) natural existence begins after the manner of that of the first man, when disobedience had estranged him from God; it is shorn of grace, and disfigured by the absence of that perfection, which is nevertheless required by his spiritual destiny. Later on, the redeeming power of Christ intervenes; it effaces that blemish by pouring grace into the soul, and incorporates into the divine family the offspring of the human family. In Mary, however, there was never any spiritual poverty, never any spot, never any estrangement from God. From the beginning of her life, grace adorned and filled her soul. If it was necessary that she should be redeemed, since she, like others, was born of the race of Adam, the redeeming power influenced her in an entirely different manner. Instead of atoning for her sins it guarded her from committing them, instead of raising her again from the common fall, it preserved her from being numbered with the fallen, and from her first moments it elevated her to the dignity of the children of God. That unique mode of redemption and that inversion of the ordinary connection between nature and grace, proclaimed her who should bear a unique relation to the author of grace and redemption. And in truth the Immaculate Conception of Mary — and this is what makes that mystery so glorious for her—is intimately connected with all her prerogatives. If God brought her into the world with such fulness of innocence and holiness, it was because He saw her beforehand in the part

for which in His eternal love He destined and prepared her.

And this conception without sin is the incomparable purity which is fit and becoming in the mother of God. It is because she is to bear, nourish, and hold in her arms the incarnate Word and call Him "my Son," that she must not, even for an instant, turn aside from God, and range herself under the standard of the devil. It is because all her members, all her senses, and her whole being were made for the service of Jesus, that she must not feel any of those earthly inclinations, which, in the ordinary course, are the result of original sin. Absolute innocence must establish in her a perfect harmony, and from her first moments, turn her entirely towards Him who is the reason of her existence. As she is destined to offer Jesus for the salvation of the world, and to sacrifice herself mystically with Him, she must, following the example of the high priest, be "undefiled, separate from sinners,"[1] and, as a sacrifice worthy of God, have neither spot nor blemish. Raised above all the choirs of angels, she is, by her innocence as well as by her dignity, the queen of all those pure beings.

This conception without sin is the full and perfect victory of the mother of God. By it she becomes the coadjutor of her Son in His work, which is the destruction of Satan and the overthrow of sin; and as she is redeemed by Him, so must she also co-operate with Him in the redemption of the world; and she will always be near Him in the conflict as

[1] Hebrews vii. 26.

well as in the triumph. God willed from the beginning that she should occupy this place, which, chosen of her own free will, should later on bring her new rights and privileges. By illuminating her with His light and quickening her by His grace, in those first moments when all other mortals lie in darkness and the shadow of death, He separated her from the multitude of the redeemed, He set her apart and elevated her to a special place. In giving her the victory over that sin which came to us from the first human couple, He placed her in opposition to Eve the sinner, as the new sanctified Eve, and stationed her by the side of the new Adam; so that, united to His Son, "by a close and indissoluble bond, with Him and by Him she wages eternal war against the venomous serpent, and completely triumphant, she bruises his head with her immaculate foot."[1]

The conception without sin is the fulness of grace which belongs to the mother of God alone. She is destined to bear within her the source itself of all spiritual good; she will become the channel by which all these gifts are distributed to all the world; her divine motherhood makes her at the same time the mother of all the righteous and of the holy Church throughout the world. And this is why from henceforth she must receive, in a manner special to herself, the mercy of the redemption; at the time when we have no spiritual life, it abounded in her; by her stainless beauty Mary is already the model of the bride without "spot or

[1] Pius IX., Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), about the middle.

wrinkle";[1] the firstborn of the redemption and first among the adopted children of God,[2] she absorbs, so to speak, unto herself, all the redeeming and sanctifying power of the Saviour.

All are waiting for her, the bride of that union which shall reconcile two empires; the King sends to her, almost to the frontier, ambassadors laden with priceless presents. The angels see the divine jewels prepared; there already rises "the smoke of myrrh, frankincense, and all perfumes";[3] and behind the procession as it advances comes the King of Peace, Who will unite the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Soon will the bride appear, soon shall we hear her song: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bride adorned with her jewels."[4]

The moment when the soul of Mary was created was, practically, for her, the time of her first betrothal, her first meeting with God. Seen in that light her Immaculate Conception presents, by the side of its glorious aspect, another and more intimate aspect. We can scarcely imagine what may have passed at that time: this mystery of grace remains an impenetrable secret between God and Mary.

[1] Ephesians v. 27.

[2] This is the appropriate title of Mary; Jesus Christ, even as man, was in no way a son by adoption.

[3] See the scene described in the Song of Solomon iii. 6-11.

[4] Introit of the Mass of the Immaculate Conception (taken from Isaiah lxi. 10).

It is the general opinion among theologians that the Immaculate received the grace of sanctification in a sentient and free soul, in perfect accord with the action of her Creator. Grace is a mysterious union between God and the intelligent creature. The dignity of this union requires, provided there is nothing to prevent it, that it should be freely accepted, and that turning towards Him, human love should respond to the advances of infinite love. It is, besides, the method of Providence that the greatest possible personal freedom of action and merit should be given to His creatures. Thus Adam, and the multitude of angels, when, at the beginning of their existence, God elevated them to spiritual rank, were neither passive nor unconscious. By love and understanding they drew towards that grace at the very moment when God was bestowing it upon them.[1] As Mary was superior in all things to the angels and to sinless man, she could not have been sanctified in a less perfect manner. It is true that, for her, the exercise of intelligence, natural to angels and to the first man created adult, must have been the effect of a miracle; but how could God have refused that miracle at the moment when He poured out His marvels upon her?

But even with the power of using her spiritual faculties without the co-operation of her senses, Mary could neither merit the first actual grace, always essentially a gift, nor prepare herself to be sanctified by an act, which, in the matter of time,

[1] This is the opinion of all the chief theologians, following that of St Thomas.

preceded the sanctification itself.[1] But by the action of those faculties which are superior to the laws of time,[2] she could turn towards God at the same moment in which He turned to her, and in that way she could fitly merit that the sanctifying grace should forthwith be poured into her soul.[3] As, when the morning sun greets and revives the flower, the stem lifts itself towards the sun, and the corolla opens and expands as if to attract and drink in the warm rays; so Mary, predisposed by the divine influence, welcomed grace as freely as possible with

[1] For she was sanctified *at the first moment* when her soul was created. Bull *Ineffabilis*, towards the end.

[2] St Thomas, in a similar case, says (1ª p., q. xcv., a. 1): "As the movement of the will is not successive, there is no reason why the first man, at the first moment of his creation, should not have consented to grace." Mary's first thoughts were not the result of development; she was created with an intellect full of intuitive perception, and in the act of thought. This act of the knowledge of God corresponds in the will to an act of love; and these acts of knowledge and of will are spiritual, for they are produced under the influence of actual grace: all of which does not require *time*. But in the *single actual moment* in which all this was accomplished, it is possible to distinguish some *virtual moments* and some actions of God or of Mary, anterior to the infusion of the sanctifying grace, in their natural order alone, and not in the order of time. Thus: 1st., Mary was predisposed by actual grace; 2nd., under the influence of this grace, her intellect, created with intuitive perception, knew God, and her will through love turned towards Him; 3rd., the sanctifying grace was poured into her soul, without there being any interval between the inclination towards grace and the grace itself.

[3] In technical terms, the personal inclination of Mary towards grace had a merit of fitness (*de congruo*) and not of condignity (*de condigno*), since the merit of condignity exists only when the sanctifying grace has already been poured into the soul.

all her faculties and all the capacity of her being.

Her spirit awoke to life, filled with ideas which she had not acquired, but which the Creator had implanted in her when He gave her being. God was there, present to her intelligence, not visible in substance,[1] but clearly revealing Himself as infinite beauty, perfect goodness, the object to which all would lead up through the Word, the Mediator. At the same time, her soul, inspired by the predisposing grace of God, cast itself entirely upon that supreme good which invited and attracted it; her intellect acquiesced in the revelation of itself,[2] and her will surrendered itself without reserve and with the most ardent love. At the same indivisible moment, when all this took place in Mary's soul, grace overflowed in her according to the unfathomable depth of her love for God, and the yet more unfathomable depth of the love of God for her. With sanctifying grace came all the privileges which belong to the essence of the grace itself, or which form its brilliant train: participation in the divine life, friendship with God,

[1] The being who is admitted to the intuitive vision of God, is so possessed by that incomparable object, that the acts of love which it produces are at that time no longer acts of free-will. Since it is admitted that Mary, in the first moment of her existence, gave herself freely to God, one can only conclude that she was at that same moment favoured with the vision of the divine essence. The writers who believe that this privilege was accorded to her at that time, speak then, or should do, not of the first moment but of one of those which immediately followed.

[2] Concerning the necessity of faith in the analogous cases of the angels and the first man, see *St Thomas*, $2^a\ 2^{ae}$, q. v., a. 1.

the indwelling of the Holy Trinity within the soul as in a consecrated temple, gifts of the Holy Ghost, and an endowment of the faculties with an inclination to all virtuous acts. And in Mary these divine forces were not in an embryonic and dormant state, as in other children who are regenerated by grace, but she was from the very beginning filled with a developed and active spiritual life; her soul was already a garden of delight which beautified all flowers, and scented all perfumes.

Man and sinful angels had both fallen because of pride. But Mary had not a thought for herself. From her first moment she turned herself entirely to God; the most simple and perfect act that one could conceive, in which was nothing but humility and love; the action of a creature forgetting herself entirely, in order that she might bring herself into harmony with her Creator. And will not this attitude of the Immaculate be, even up to the end, the attitude of "the servant of the Lord?"

The months of waiting glided away till the day of that great festival when Mary came into the world; when the All Holy illuminated and perfumed with her presence the humble dwelling of her parents; when the blessed couple could contemplate that which they had so long desired. The angels also, surrounding her cradle, rejoiced in her, venerated her already as their queen, and exalted her as the chief work of creation. God, who alone completely knew the most excellent of His works, regarded her with favour, and through His love for her looked upon all

men with increased loving-kindness. This child of benediction, announced by her birth the joy of the world; bathed in the beams of redeeming grace, she was the dawn of salvation; the Messiah Himself would soon appear, and the earth, so to speak, already possessed something of Him.

Nevertheless, the beginning of the great work was accomplished in silence, and dwelt unknown of men. The members of the holy family alone rejoiced and had a glimpse of the divine work, but without realising all its grandeur. Anne and Joachim, who had doubtless been warned from on high of the priceless treasure which had been confided to their care, thanked God for having so superabundantly answered their prayer, and, conscious that His guiding hand was with them, they prayed Him to fulfil His intentions to the very end. And Mary, in the retirement and silence of her home life, offered to God the most perfect praises He had ever received from human creature, and surrendered herself entirely to His love.

## CHAPTER III

THE NAME OF "MARY" — PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE—THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE IMMACULATE —HER FIRST YEARS IN THE TEMPLE (ABOUT 19-7 B.C.)

FRIENDS and relatives assembled at Anne's house. After having congratulated the happy mother, they admired the celestial beauty of the child with its peaceful smile. As so often happens, she probably bore some resemblance to the features of her father. But, while ordering that the laws of heredity should have their course, Providence had chosen the ancestors with a view to the latest scion. According to the law of nature, Mary resembled her parents, and Jesus must in like manner resemble Mary; but, in the case of this divine example, Anne and Joachim had been created for Mary, and Mary was created entirely for Jesus. When God fashioned the body of Adam, He saw beforehand His Word incarnate, and "while modelling each feature of the clay he thought of Christ, who would one day be man."[1] With even greater reason, at the moment of accomplishing the eternal design, it was in the image of the Son that God made the mother; and as it was the grace of Jesus which filled her soul,

[1] Tertullian: *de resurrectione carnis*, vi. (PL. ii. 802).

her countenance was also illumined in advance with a reflection of the beauty of Jesus.

On the fifteenth day after the birth, as was the custom for girls, came the ceremony of giving the name. There are so many examples in Scripture where God Himself names His servants, that it is hardly possible to believe that the name of His mother was left to chance or to the mere human will. Without doubt heaven itself had chosen for her the name formerly borne by the sister of Moses, *Miriam*, perhaps pronounced *Maryam* towards the end of our era, and which we write *Mary*.[1]

This name, especially if God Himself had indicated it, was very suitable for this child so singularly blessed. But the secret of the exact symbolism has not hitherto been discovered. In bringing forward various hypotheses we cannot say with certainty what was, in the days of the Exodus, its original etymology, or what meaning was attached to it in the time of Anne and Joachim.[2]

[1] In the Pentateuch, the Massoretic reading is *Miryâm*. But the Septuagint transcribes *Maryam* and the Evangelists also write *Maryam* and sometimes *Maria*. It should be pronounced, not Ma-ri-am, but the y (jod) as a consonant, *Mar-yam*, in two syllables.

[2] The most recent and complete work upon the name of Mary is that by Bardenhewer (*Der Name Maria*, 1895). The list of meanings discussed in the volume, number 67. A certain number, it is true, cannot be distinguished separately as they are interchangeable; and a certain number also are evidently untenable. We may, however, inquire how so many different interpretations of the same word have been brought together, and how it is that there still remains room for doubt. Here are some indications, too brief to be complete, but which will at least aid us in understanding this. 1st. The word came from Egypt with the sister of

At the dawn of the Christian era, the land of Israel was near enough to Syria, by language as well as geographically, for a Syriac name to be possibly

Moses, and we should therefore seek an Egyptian etymology for it. In that case it would perhaps have the meaning of "well-beloved" (see Hummelauer, *in Exodum*, p. 161). It has also been tried, it appears, to find authority in Egyptology for "Star of the Sea" (see Knabenbauer, *in Matthæum*, p. 44). 2nd. *Maryam* has often been compared with the Syriac *mâr*, lord, with the meaning of sovereign, but neither *Maryam* nor *Maria* is the feminine of *mâr*. 3rd. If the name is Hebrew, which to-day is considered most probable, we may ask if it be not formed from two words, the second of which is *yâm*, sea. Modern authorities are, in general, not very favourable to this hypothesis; they see rather in *am* a simple nominal termination, and in consequence, incline to exclude the meaning where the idea of *sea* comes in. 4th. It remains for us to search for the principal Hebrew root, whether the name is formed from two words or one, if *am* is only a termination. It has been suggested: A. *Mârâh*, to be obstinate (the idea of Hiller, and of Gesenius, which is not widely accepted); B. *Râm*, to be exalted, strong, powerful; C. *Râ'âh*, to see, in *hiphil*, to cause to see, from whence, in the participle of the *hiphil* form, illuminatrice; with *yâm*, illuminatrice [star?] of the sea; D. *Mârar*, to be bitter or afflicted; to the same root is joined *môr*, myrrh (the hypothesis which sees the idea of myrrh in the name of Mary is that which P. Knabenbauer prefers), and *mar*, drop (she is sometimes called *Stilla maris*); E. Mârâ', literally, to be well developed and robust, *wohlbeleibt*, says Bardenhewer; before him Schegg had proposed *prœchtig*, magnificent, which is perhaps more suitable. From the etymological meaning, orientals pass quickly to the idea of beauty, with the special signification, so appreciated by them, of physical beauty. Evidently that strength and that beauty, in connection with Mary, must be understood in the spiritual sense. (This last hypothesis is that preferred by Bardenhewer.) In the text are indicated some of the meanings which could perhaps be maintained with an appearance of truth; it is difficult to choose the right one with certainty.

borne by a Jewess, or perhaps for a Jewish name, even though contrary to its primitive sense, to be commonly interpreted by a Syriac word of approximate meaning. In fact, the Syriac *mâr*, lord, has apparently given the feminine name *Martha*, lady or mistress. To interpret *Maryam* in the same sense is not grammatically correct. It does not however seem impossible that the people interpreted it thus, as later, certain Fathers have translated Mary as "lady" or "sovereign." Without going beyond the limits of the Hebrew language the word could have almost the same meaning, that of "exalted" and "powerful." Perhaps Mary might even be "the illuminatrice," and that name would admirably suit her who made the light of Christ to rise upon the world and upon the souls of men. Finally modern interpreters find rather in that name the sense of beauty. That beauty which is in strength and in blessedness, that of the fulness of grace, and of the august queen of heaven. And yet again, as other biblical names are borrowed from trees or the most graceful flowers, that of Mary recalls myrrh from which flows one of the precious perfumes of the east; and by that, it expresses symbolically grace and fragrance, bitterness and incorruption.

Perhaps it is because of the gracious ideas which it suggests that mothers so frequently choose this name for their daughters. But God reserved to Himself to bestow upon her, this woman above all others, the fulness of its signification. And those who later bear this name in her honour should

endeavour to reproduce in their souls some features of her spiritual beauty.

It was fitting that such a child should grow up as near as possible to the sanctuary ; her place, indicated beforehand, and as was quite natural, was in the shadow of the house of God. Her parents did not contend for her with Him who desired her entirely for Himself, and whose claims, love, and influence upon her, so far surpassed their claims, their cares and their affection. Perhaps they had even beforehand vowed her to His service and to His Temple. So great was the ardour of her soul to seek God and to give herself to Him, that she could only wish to conceive or to confirm such a vow.

Also, provided that one is careful to avoid a certain number of details evidently legendary, borrowed from the apocryphal gospels, there is no difficulty in admitting in substance that the child Mary was brought to the Temple, there offered to God, and lived in some building belonging to it during the time of her education. This fact, it is true, is not supported by historical evidence as trustworthy as one could wish ; and, on the other hand, the Church, when it recalls this episode to remembrance in the feast of the Presentation of Mary, does not profess to give its seal of authority to the whole. Nevertheless, the purely historical presumption is favourable to the common opinion, for the childhood of Mary formed a remarkable portion of her life. And, though in olden times much may have been unknown concerning the life

of Our Lady, it seems probable that it would have been known whether her first years were, or were not, passed under the paternal roof. But antiquity has not handed down to us any tradition opposed to the current belief; ancient authors, when they speak explicitly of the childhood of Mary, place her in the Temple and nowhere else. It appears then, that the fact of her education near the holy place may have made part of the historic sketch transmitted by the first Christian generation. The authors of the *Protevangelium of James*, of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and of the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* embroider a good deal upon that foundation, but they do not appear to have invented it. And, on other grounds than those purely historical, the fact that the Greek Fathers have so commonly admitted and preached of the Presentation in the Temple, that the churches of the East have made a feast day of it from very early times, and that the Roman Church itself has for several centuries observed it as a feast, constitute a weighty argument in favour of this tradition.

There is therefore nothing improbable in the statement that a child was thus offered to God and brought up near His Temple. On the contrary, a certain number of documents agree with the testimony of christian antiquity.

We know, by the holy Scriptures, that people could "consecrate their souls to the Lord," and that this vow could be taken by women as well as by men, by children as well as by adults.[1]

[1] See Leviticus xxvii. 1-9 (note verse 6). Verse 2 in the

Frequently, as the text itself indicates, people liberated themselves from similar vows by way of redemption. But could they not also as well fulfil them, by the gift to the Temple of their persons and their services? The only reason for doubting this in the case of women, is that it might be questioned whether there was any office or employment for them near the holy place.

But here again, several indications seem to favour the tradition. We could, it is true, doubt seriously whether the "virgins that were shut up," who, at the moment of the attempted sacrilege of Heliodorus, ran in great terror towards the high priest, were really those who had been brought up in the Temple[1]; it is quite possible that in this case they may have been simply young girls who were living in seclusion under the paternal roof. But, setting aside this obscure and doubtful text, other passages and other reasons suggest that women could work for the sanctuary, and even associate themselves in a special manner with the liturgy. From the time of Moses and Aaron, the women "that were wise hearted," embroidered for the Tabernacle linen cloths and stuffs richly dyed in colours of violet and purple[2]; and it is clear that those who were most

Vulgate reads, "The man that shall have made a vow, and promised his soul to God"; in the Hebrew, "The man who shall have promised souls . . ." (for example, a father his children). Concerning this passage, the protestant authors of the annotated Bible of Neuchâtel (vol. ii., 124) also admit that the vow could be personally fulfilled even by women.

[1] 2 Maccabees iii. 19; compare the Greek and note the variations.

[2] Exodus xxxv. 25, 26.

devoted to the God of Israel could always occupy themselves with similar work. Formerly, in the religious processions, women and young girls played upon timbrels, and repeated the refrains of the canticles.[1] It is even possible that a choir of women, at least sometimes, and at a little distance, joined in the liturgical chants of the Temple. Finally and above all, the Bible makes mention twice of women who, in the remote times of Mosaic worship, formed a kind of guard of honour at the entrance to the Tabernacle.[2] Perhaps it is to one of these passages, perhaps to some tradition not recorded in Scripture, that Saint Ambrose made allusion when he said, "We read that there were virgins attached to the Temple even at Jerusalem.[3]"

It seems natural, and it is a thing quite commonly admitted, that there must have been some habitation in the immediate neighbourhood of the sacred precincts, for those women whose functions brought them most frequently within those precincts. For this purpose there may have been houses very near the Temple, there may have been even in the Temple itself, some of those rooms and lodgings which are often referred to in the Bible,[4] and which Josephus is careful to mention.[5] The fact that Joash was,

[1] Exodus xv. 20, 21; Psalm lxviii. 25.

[2] Exodus xxxviii. 8; 1 Samuel ii. 22 (note also the Hebrew word *ṣâbâ'*, which speaks of a guard performing its duties at regular hours like a military guard).

[3] *De virginibus*, I. iii. (PL. xvi. 192).

[4] 2 Kings xxiii. 11; 1 Chronicles ix. 26, 27, 33; and elsewhere.

[5] *Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII. iii. XV. xi.

for six years, hidden in that retreat with his nurse and Jehosheba,[1] suffices to prove that women were not excluded.

We know what was the arrangement of the Temple. It was a traditional arrangement; the same in the post-exile reconstruction as in the work of Solomon and his successors; the arrangement preserved by Herod when he rebuilt, on a larger scale, the Temple of Zerubbabel.[2] Courts and buildings covered a huge rectangle upon the summit of mount Moriah. The "house of God," that is to say, the sanctuary properly so called, comprising the "Holy Place" and the "Holy of Holies," was the spiritual centre of the whole, though it did not occupy the geometrical centre. It was placed halfway, or very nearly so, between the north and south sides of the area, but much nearer the west side to which its chevet was set very close, than to the east side. In front of the entrance to this sanctuary, which entrance was turned towards the east because the "house of God" extended towards the interior of the rectangle, was erected, open to the sky, the great altar upon which sacrifices were consumed by fire. Then, enclosing the altar and the sanctuary on the north, east and south sides, and surrounding both, extended two rectangular concentric courts in which the worshippers assembled in the open air; that of the priests and Levites, and that of the

[1] 2 Kings xi. 3; 2 Chronicles xxii. 12.

[2] Much may be learned by a careful study of the *carte murale* in which M. P. Aucler has so successfully attempted a reconstruction of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus Christ.

people of Israel, of which a separate part was called the court of the women. Herod—who commenced the rebuilding of the Temple about the time that Mary was brought to it—surrounded the whole of this by a much larger court, the court of the Gentiles. The courts were separated from each other not only by balustrades, but by passages also, notwithstanding the inconvenience of obstructing, for a great number, the view of the altar and the sacrifices by actual buildings. It was then, in all probability, in one of those buildings nearest to the exterior, that the dwelling of those who were more especially consecrated to the service of God should be sought. There, without doubt, wives of the priests or widows brought up in piety some chosen children, those probably who, because of a vow, were brought to pass their youth near the holy place.

In obtaining admittance for their holy child, Anne and Joachim probably found a useful coadjutor in their relative, the priest Zacharias. When they brought her to the temple, according to the apocryphal gospels and the Greek Fathers, Mary was three years old. This detail is not supported by history, but it is not without some semblance of truth. Three years, in the customs of the Jews, ended the period of nursing, and the parents of Samuel, when he had reached that age, hastened to present their son at the Tabernacle of Shiloh. Why should the parents of Mary, if they also were bound by a vow, have been less eager to accomplish it? More especially as, where God Himself is concerned, Scripture always reveals to us a certain readiness to welcome the

first fruits, especially when the first fruits are excellent.

As far as we can, by analogy,[1] conjecture what passed on the day of presentation, Anne and Joachim offered a sacrifice, and going with their child into the court of the women, they worshipped God, gave thanks to Him, and implored Him to accept their most pure offering, more precious than any burnt offering which they could bring before His altar. Then Mary was separated from those whom she already loved with all her young and tender heart, who were more to her than any one save God Himself; and whilst the saintly elders watched her from a distance, the women brought her to that part of the Temple where she would for the future be brought up.

The ancient chroniclers are pleased to say that Mary walked with rapid steps, without turning her head, and that no one heard her, as is usually the case with children of her age, ask again for her parents. This was but the legendary and naïve expression of the incontestable truth that the Virgin, in her progress towards God, knew neither delay nor hesitation; she gave herself simply, entirely, and without reserve; no earthly tie held her in her straight and rapid ascension, with her heart yearning towards infinite goodness.

The souls consecrated to God, whether for the

[1] Hannah . . . brought the child, with three bullocks, an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine. . . . They immolated a bullock, and offered the child to Eli. . . . And they worshipped the Lord. . . . 1 Samuel i. 24-28 (Heb.).

service of the altar or for the practice of evangelical virtues, are enraptured at the sight of the Immaculate, advancing joyously and without turning, towards the Sanctuary. Priests, monks, and virgins, love to renew their most holy vows on the day of her Presentation; they are carried away by her example, they dedicate themselves anew as in the glow of youth, and, in prayer, they beseech her to guard in them to the end, for the service of God, something of the purity and sincerity of her own child-like heart.

The childhood of Mary was, in fact, a model even for the most advanced. The Book of Wisdom speaks of a maturity of intelligence which usually accompanies grey hairs, and of a life without stain, which was like the years of old age.[1] Such was, from her earliest years, the maturity of Mary. Never did any actual fault—it is affirmed by the Church—[2] not even the least of venial failings, render her less pleasing in the sight of God.

This absolute exemption from all personal fault, like the exemption from hereditary stain, was exacted by the divine maternity; and the conception without sin had been a preparation for the whole of an immaculate life. One of the results of original innocence was absolute command of the faculties, the subordination of the passions and senses to the empire of reason. The mind of Mary was, without ceasing, centred upon God, her will was always steadfast in Him by a love, stronger than

[1] *Book of Wisdom* iv. 8, 9.

[2] Council of Trent, session vi., canon 23.

anything that could attract her among imagined blessings. Finally she was watched over by the ever vigilant Providence of God, and by His mercy always superabundant. So much help from without and within, bestowed upon her a confirmation in absolute grace much more perfect than the partial confirmation accorded to any great saints.

But that happy impossibility of sinning and even of having any inclination towards evil, did not subject her to any determinism, and made no obstacle, but far otherwise, to any of the conditions of merit. Even pain and sorrow were not to be escaped. The only unhappiness unknown to her was the struggle against inward temptation. There remained to her the painful effort of all the sufferings which she embraced or accepted; privations imposed upon the senses by asceticism, or the fatigue of daily labour while awaiting the sorrows of the soul which God reserved for her. As for liberty, she possessed it as we do; she possessed it in an even greater degree, for the danger of choosing evil is not of the essence of liberty, but is, on the contrary, an imperfection.[1] Her liberty was so much the more complete, because no error, no ignorance, no disturbance of the senses or passions obscured the judgment of the mind; in a word, that perfect liberty, which, more like than ours to divine liberty, chose in full light and in full possession of itself whatever good it desired.

[1] As a created being her liberty was not intrinsically incapable of faltering; but the help to which reference has been made, rendered all failure a complete moral impossibility.

Nevertheless, though possessed of graces and incomparable gifts, she was a child, and remained one as long as other children. But as she is, among other things, the epitome of human life, her childishness was much less than that evangelical childishness so esteemed in the kingdom of heaven: the state of man morally adult who voluntarily humbles and abases himself, that he may, in all things, do the good pleasure of his heavenly Father. Subjection, the lower place in all things, continual dependence, the thousand acts of renunciation which almost unconsciously and without merit, others do, or are made to do, she, mistress of her judgment and of her will, accepted with free will.

If she was, joyously and of her free will, thus humbled,[1] it was because she was essentially meek. No one has ever had in the same degree as she, that "very real knowledge of himself, which makes man vile in his own eyes."[2] For, better than any of the greatest ascetics, better in certain respects than the angels of paradise, who in self-forgetfulness sing, "Holy, holy, holy," to Him who dwells alone, she saw the nothingness of every creature; she felt between herself and God an infinite distance; and bowing down before His supreme majesty, she

[1] Saint Francis de Sales, Sermon for the feast of Saint Nicolas of Tolentino (10 September); ed. d'Annecy, vol. ix. 349. This sermon and the three sermons upon the Presentation of the Holy Virgin (in the same volume) abound in charming touches concerning the evangelical infancy and the psychology of the child Mary.

[2] Saint Bernard: *de gradibus humilitatis*, near the beginning (PL. clxxxii. 942).

ascribed to Him all the homage which she herself had received.

And her habit of looking up to God without ceasing, and of living as if lost in Him, explains her sentiments towards mankind. Not only her love for all, glowing, delicate, and attentive, flowed from her love towards Him, but also, from her humility towards God came her humility before His creatures. Those who, during her early years had authority over her, priests or pious women, represented in her eyes the only Master, and she was docile to their least desires, as signs of the will of heaven.

She was humble even towards her companions. Preferred by God before all His works, she did not esteem herself better than any of the children that surrounded her. How should she dream of exalting herself above them, whoever they might be, when she herself was so profoundly humble before God? When a poor man feels his poverty so deeply that he has no thought save for his misery, how can it enter into his mind that he is richer than many others? And because Mary had, more than other people, knowledge of her nothingness, she was of all people the most humble; and because she felt more intensely than others, the innate poverty of the creature, she esteemed herself also the least of all.

The more so that, if she chose to contemplate her own low estate, it pleased her to admire in others the gifts of God; and, comparing that which in her herself was nothing, with that which was grace and virtue in her companions, she thought more highly of others, and humbled herself in spirit before them.

Assuredly, if she had fully considered in herself and in her neighbour, that which came from the creature and that which came from God, she could not, by an impartial judgment, have declared herself inferior: for in that case it would have been a false judgment, and the perfection of her mind preserved her from all error. But she could, in considering only a part of things, compare the nothingness of her created nature with the gifts which she saw in her companions, and we cannot doubt that she loved to do so.[1] Why should she thus consider, in an imperfect view, the nothingness and not the virtues in herself, and in others the virtues and not the nothingness or defects? There lies the secret itself, the lovely grace, the mysterious perfume of humility. In the words of the Canticles, Mary was the lily, and her companions were the thorns; and the lily had that supreme charm of not esteeming herself above the thorns, and of developing in ignorance of her beauty.

This good and lovely child, developed and grew up during those years, while God and men, but God especially, and almost entirely in everything, educated her in mind and heart.

When her soul, even at the moment of its creation turned towards God, her first thought was miraculously independent of her organism. Much was thus taught her, and it is probable that this

[1] *Cf.* St Thomas, $2^a$ $2^{æ}$, q. clxi., a 3. The whole of this article should be seen, for besides the theory of humility here set forth, it contains certain reservations which should also be taken into account.

marvellous method of intellectual operations was never withdrawn from her. Though this is but a fleeting gift among those contemplative people who receive the favour, with her it remained permanently. God had given her from the beginning a certain amount of knowledge, placed by Himself in her mind; and, during the course of her childhood and her life, He augmented, when He so willed, that treasure of enlightenment, which formed the "intuitive knowledge" of Mary. However, when her faculties began to act, and commenced to transmit to the brain the impressions from outside, a new mode of acquiring knowledge was added to the first, the mode used by us, following which the organic faculties presented to the mind the matter from which, by abstraction, they had drawn their ideas. After, and at the same time as the "intuitive knowledge," came the "acquired knowledge," which continued and harmoniously completed it.

In this class of acquired knowledge, Mary's childish intelligence had a normal and natural development. In many cases, it is true, she learned by the ordinary methods of human knowledge that which God had already otherwise shown her; and her progress consisted not in knowing other things, but in knowing them in a different way. But at other times she acquired in this way knowledge that was really new.

For God had not revealed all to His privileged one. She had never been really ignorant, with that ignorance of things that ought to be known, which is a humiliating imperfection; but she had to begin

with the incomplete knowledge which is progressive, and which at the most suitable time gathers to itself fresh intellectual treasures. Further, God usually reveals things rather than words, and intelligible realities rather than material objects. Mary was therefore able to possess the spiritual doctrine of the Scriptures before knowing the details of the text, or the forms of the twenty-two graphic signs, or the differences between biblical Hebrew and the language as it was commonly spoken, or the melody used in chanting the psalms. And yet she could have abundant enlightenment upon the things of the created world, which enabled her to praise the Creator acceptably, even though she did not possess the art of mingling the threads of linen and gold in embroidery, or of executing other work after the manner of the women of her time and country.

She could therefore learn in the Temple, and in a certain degree, she could be taught. It is true, nevertheless, that she owed as little as possible to her teachers. Her intelligence was perfect; and that which she knew by Divine revelation gave her powerful aid in the acquisition of fresh knowledge. Under such conditions she must have learned, not only with an incredible rapidity, but, when scarcely placed upon the road, she must have outstripped those who had the duty of instructing her. Everything indicates, however, that she hid her progress as much as was possible, and made herself appear to advance at the same rate as her companions.

She progressed above all by personal study, reflec-

tion, the comparison of things that she already knew, and always by the unceasing aid of the Divine light. The wise men of the Old Testament were obliged to meditate without ceasing upon the Law and upon the Word of God; and such was the constant occupation of Mary. She increased in the knowledge of God, of His works, of His providence, of His designs of love upon our hearts, upon Israel, and upon mankind; she penetrated into the meaning of the commandments, especially into the greatest of all, that of charity; she entered, even further than David himself, into the sentiments of the sacred songs; she followed, in the history of the Hebrew people and in the prophets, the progressive preparation for the kingdom of God. And, under the enigmas of the prophecies, and the veil of the symbols, it was always the Messiah that she saw; without knowing yet the details of His life and work, and quite ignorant of the part which she herself would take in it, but knowing the God incarnate who would bring light to men and save them by His humiliation, loving Him beforehand, and knowing that, in Scripture, in the world, and in history, everything related to Him.

Filled with these thoughts, the Virgin poured out her heart in songs of praise and fervent supplication.[1] She prayed for herself. For it is a universal

[1] The revelations of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, concerning the prayers which the Virgin made in the Temple, are well known. See Montalembert. M. Horn, the recent historian of the Saint, refers to Montalembert himself, and while adding scarcely anything quotes him in part. The revelation upon the prayers of

law that if God of His goodness anticipates the prayer, it is His desire that prayer should obtain the graces which follow, and the increase of holiness. Inasmuch as He had called Mary to a pre-eminent holiness, He would make her pray to Him as human creature had never prayed before, and it would please Him to hear her beseech Him day and night that she might advance in His love. She prayed for all the world, asking God to hasten the hour of His salvation, and perhaps, in her humility, offering to be the humble servant of the Virgin who should one day give birth to the Messiah.

When Mary, before the altar of the old covenant, thus poured forth her praises and her prayers, she was not only one of the members of the human family, but the holiest of all and the most pleasing to God. She already represented the whole of that family. For it is her part to be at the same time maternal, royal, and sacerdotal, to carry within herself, and to symbolise, while surpassing it, all the faithful portion of humanity. Soon, in receiving the Christ, she would conceive with Him all the regenerated who are His members. Now, during the days of her childhood, she is the type of the first age of the human race, and of all the just under the ancient Law. She reunites in herself, she brings

Mary is referred to in the thirteenth century in the *Meditations upon the life of Christ*, chap. iii. Except for one or two details which might present some difficulty, it is an admirable work. There are many fine passages also, in particular those relating to the meditations of Mary upon the ancient priesthood and the expected Messiah, in the *Vie intérieure de la Sainte Vierge*, edited from the notes of M. Olier.

to perfection, and she presents to God all the worship, praises, and desires of that Church of waiting and preparation. Whilst, quite near her, the Levitical priest sacrifices and burns the flesh of victims which are worthless in themselves, she animates the ancient worship by the fervency of her spirit and her prayer; she offers to God the sacrifice which pleases Him, that of praise coming from pure lips and a spotless heart; and realising the insufficiency of the ceremonies of the law, and even of prayer itself, if it does not rise to Heaven through the only Mediator of man, she vivifies all the worship of the old world by faith in the Messiah, whose unique sacrifice will for ever bring peace to earth and heaven.

The transports of Mary's heart were more pleasing to God than the burnt sacrifices of the patriarchs and of the sons of Aaron; they hastened the day of mercy, and of the new covenant. The ark of the old covenant was never placed in the sanctuary built on the return from the exile, and yet at that day, thanks to the humble child who prayed in its precincts, the new Temple was more glorious than the old; the symbol had already given place to the reality; it possessed the true Ark, upon which, more fully than in the days of Moses and Solomon, rested the majesty of God.

## CHAPTER IV

### SAINT JOSEPH; THE VIRGIN MARRIAGE (ABOUT THE YEAR 7 B.C.)—THE ANNUNCIATION (25 MARCH, 6 (?) B.C.)

GOD had sanctified Joachim and Anne beforehand, to make them worthy of Mary; and, after having given her to them, He blessed them anew because of her. The stream of blessings received by the Immaculate flowed back upon her parents. Her presence under their roof, her first words and the first outward signs of her piety, the sacrifice of leaving her in the Temple and the sight of her ardour in giving herself to God, the discovery, when they went to visit her, of her marvellous progress—all these things had been for them, encouragement and help in holiness. When they had attained the abundant measure of grace which made them solemnly honoured by all the christian Church, God called them from this world. This happened, it is commonly affirmed, during the sojourn of Mary in the Temple.[1]

The separation from them had been the first sorrow

[1] Painters have frequently represented Saint Anne with Mary and the Child Jesus in their pictures of the Holy Family. But the greater number of writers place the death of Mary's parents before the Incarnation. There are, however, no texts of real historical value, nor decisive arguments on one side or the other.

of their daughter, and losing them was a grief still more bitter. For, the more Mary loved God, the more she loved, in Him and for Him, all her relatives. In surrounding with an ardent affection those to whom she owed her existence, and those who had consecrated her life to prayer and to the service of the Temple, she was conforming to the Divine will; in ministering to them, perhaps at the time of their death, and certainly mourning them with a profound grief, she was also acting in accordance with the most holy and pure love. But her sorrow was peaceful, with an inward consolation, for she knew that they slept in the grace of God, and in expectation of the Redeemer, who would open to the righteous the gates of heaven.

Perhaps her orphan condition had some influence upon that "state of humility"[1] of which Mary spoke soon afterwards. "When my father and my mother forsake me," she could say in her prayer, "then the Lord will take me up."[2] The more she was separated from human affection, the more did God Himself direct the conduct of her life.

It was not only the loss of her parents that estranged her from the world. Voluntarily, and from her inmost heart, she had forever detached

[1] St Luke i. 48. Mary could above all say that God had regarded His servant who was but a humble creature and nothing before the Creator. Nevertheless, it is possible that in the word ταπείνωσις, which expresses the state of humiliation, is also comprehended the humble condition to which she found herself reduced in the eyes of the world.

[2] Psalm xxvii. 10.

herself from the world. We see by one of her sayings to the angel Gabriel, that before the day of the Annunciation, she had, in a definite manner, dedicated her virginity to God.[1] We do not know, however, at what precise period she renewed this vow.[2] It agrees so exactly with our idea of Mary that we need not seek too far for its origin. From her first act, her love of the Immaculate was shown in the gift of her whole self; this gift excluded beforehand everything which could share her heart; it included a most pure intention of pleasing God in all things, and a perfect consecration to His service. The day came when Mary comprehended how acceptable is virgin purity in the divine sight. And from that time, desirous of always preserving that precious virtue, and of making by a vow the practice of it more steadfast and perfect, she bound herself by a formal and explicit undertaking. It sometimes pleases God to put this promise in the hearts and on the lips of children who are called to a state of great perfection. Who can say how early

[1] St Luke i. 34.

[2] Theologians have put forward various hypotheses. According to St Thomas (3ª p., q. xxviii., a. 4), there was at first the desire, or rather, a conditional vow; then the will of God being clearly made known, an absolute vow at the time of marriage. According to Suarez (*De mysteriis Christi*, t. II., disp. vi., sect. 2), ". . . Many virgins are consecrated to God by the vow of chastity, almost from the cradle; there is every reason to believe the same of her, the chief of all virgins, who stands at the head of them all and is their perfect pattern." Of these two opinions I incline to that expressed in the passage quoted from Suarez. I have added the distinction between entire implicit consecration to God, and explicit consecration by the vow of virginity.

the Holy Spirit inspired her, the most perfect, the most enlightened of His creatures, to do that which caused her to be for ever known as "the Virgin"? "After her shall virgins be brought to the king"[1]; but it is she who raises above the world the standard of virginity; she stands first, because no one before her had taken a similar vow, or at least because the finest virtues belong in a special manner to the grace of the New Testament which blossomed in the world only after the appearance of Mary and Jesus.

In taking a pledge so new among the people of Israel, Mary certainly did not believe, as has occasionally been too lightly said, that she renounced the possibility of becoming the mother of the Messiah. But neither did she dream of thereby anticipating that motherhood. Very far from hoping for herself so great an honour, and entirely free from every personal consideration, her mind dwelt upon God alone, her single and most pure intention was to please Him. Having besides, an intimate experience of the influence of grace, and feeling that she therein followed the direction of the Spirit of God, she gave herself up to His guidance; without foreseeing anything, she referred to Providence the difficulties which might influence her decision, at an age when all others would have followed a different course.

According to the divine plan, the Word made flesh must be born of a virgin. But it was not fitting

[1] Psalm xliv. 15 (Vulgate).

that this great miracle should be exposed to the sight or to the discussion of men: the righteous believed it from the Word of God, and on the testimony of a trustworthy revelation; while it remained hidden to the unbelieving. It was, says a very ancient tradition,[1] hidden even from the spirits of evil; for it is a belief very wide-spread, and founded upon Scripture, that evil spirits never knew clearly and with certainty that Jesus was the Son of God.[2]

Further, it was necessary that the Virgin, chosen of God, should have in this world a help and support to take care of her and her Son. During the days of the birth of the Messiah, which were to be days of trial, of poverty, and even of flight into a far country, it was fitting that the young mother should have a protector at her side. And it was also suitable that the Child should have near His cradle some one who, in the name of His only Father in heaven, should take the place of an earthly father, guarding Him, working for His support, and later, initiating Him into that laborious life which He was destined to lead for many years.

It was therefore under the veil of marriage that the mystery was accomplished. In that virgin, and

[1] Ignatius of Antioch: *Epistola ad Ephesios*, xix. (PG. v. 660).

[2] This ignorance can only be explained by two reasons: the intelligence of evil spirits, turned away from truth and all that is good, is unable to fathom the mysteries of God and spiritual things; and further, God can stay them upon the threshold of the sanctuary and prevent them from giving a complete account of what they have learned.

yet very real union, the bride and bridegroom truly gave themselves to each other, but as one would give jewels already consecrated to God, which one would deliver into faithful hands, to be guarded with a supreme reverence. They would exchange their tendernesses, their cares, the anticipation of each other's wishes, and enjoy all that happiness which makes for married people the community of life; but their mutual affection into which nothing earthly entered, encroached in no degree upon the entire dedication of their hearts to God alone. It was in God that they loved each other; they were united only to help one another to serve Him better; they would have no other thought than Him, no other desire than that of pleasing Him.[1] And soon, the Child which heaven would miraculously bring to their chaste home, would be for them an incomparable blessing, and the supreme bond of their hearts in the love of God alone. Such a holy and perfect union as this goes far beyond earthly thought; the idea of it could come only from heaven; and, if every marriage reminds us in some degree of the reciprocal love of Christ and His Church,[2] none ever symbolised as theirs that fruitful and virgin union.

It was necessary then, to find "a faithful and wise servant, whom God might appoint to be the comfort of His mother, the foster-father of His own flesh, and the only and trusty helper in the eternal counsels."[3] This man, to whom all ages owe their

[1] See 1 Corinthians vii. 32-35. [2] Ephesians v. 23-32.

[3] St Bernard: *super missus est homilia* ii., § 16 (PL. clxxxiii. 69-70).

gratitude, since, after Mary, he helped to introduce the Saviour to the world; this man, who has a right to special worship on the part of the Church, since, as guardian of the body of Christ, he is thereby constituted the protector of His mystic body; this man, God had long beforehand chosen and prepared. He was a relative of the Virgin, older than she by perhaps fifteen or twenty years,[1] the brother of Cleophas, the son born of Jacob to be the lawful heir of Heli, the humble carpenter, Joseph.

Concerning his early years, Scripture is absolutely silent. The Gospel speaks of him briefly, in giving the ancestry of Jesus, then it leaves him in obscurity. For a long time Joseph was neither known nor honoured among the faithful as he deserved to be. It was only after long ages, at the time marked out by Providence, that christian thought fully comprehended how much nobleness and sanctity there was

[1] Propriety, but a propriety which is self-evident, is the chief and excellent ground of this assertion. God wished that His Son should be born under the appearance of marriage, and it was therefore necessary to make that marriage as suitable and well-assorted as was possible. Without doubt then, He gave the Virgin a spouse who was virgin also, of an age which commanded respect, without being too far removed from Mary's age. This is the reason why at the present day everyone thinks of Saint Joseph, at the time of the birth of Jesus, as a man of thirty or thirty-five years old. It was by following a false idea, and not depending upon traditional documents, that the authors of the apocryphal Gospels saw in Mary's guardian the octogenarian whom they described. This conclusion must be altogether abandoned, and it is to be regretted that any of their wrong conceptions have found their way into a part of ancient ecclesiastical literature, and in consequence into christian art.

in his character. The inner life overflowed in the soul of this silent and unknown artisan; the rarest virtues there attained their full development; the love that is charity reigned there and governed all his acts. The Gospel, in passing, calls him "just"; and a moment of reflection makes us understand with what entire justice he acted, and what perfection was his. For it was to his faithful hands that God confided His immaculate mother; his heart was bound to the heart of Mary, and therefore to the heart of Jesus also, by the most intimate affinity and the purest affection; and in short, since he was judged worthy of contracting that union, which required a likeness of soul and a certain equality, it must be that no one, so much as he, could have resembled the queen of angels, and could not in the same degree have sustained comparison with her.

No document worthy of credence tells us how Joseph was chosen to be the guardian of Mary, or the circumstances of Mary's acceptance of Joseph as a husband.[1] The Church, in its liturgical prayer,

[1] It appears impossible to separate the truth, underlying the legend of the rods sent to the High Priest in order to obtain a sign from heaven. This legend, moreover, presents itself with diverse variations and corrections. The most ancient version which has come down to us (*Protevangelium of Jesus*, viii., ix.) conforms neither to history, nor to the dignity of St Joseph, nor to any probability of truth. How can we credit that summons of the suitors at the sound of the trumpet, and that dazzling miracle, when God desired silence and secrecy? By the side of the legendary explanation, it has been attempted to give the scientific explanation that some considerations relating to kinship and Jewish legislation may have obliged Mary and Joseph to make a mutual agreement; but all this is very uncertain.

speaks of this as the ineffable Providence of God.[1] And, in fact, the only possible explanation is the intervention of the wisdom and power of God, guiding by secret and wonderful ways the souls who confide in Him. Mary, in choosing virginity, gave herself up to that Providence which is always faithful. Providence inspired Joseph with a resolution similar to that of Mary; it made known to each of them the intention of the other;[2] it manifested to them that it would be pleasing to God to see them united, in order that they might together preserve what they had promised to Him.

According to the customs of the Jews, marriage comprised three successive acts. There was at first some negotiation between the two families, and an understanding—and it was here that God intervened —ending in the free consent of both parties, and their promise to wed each other.

Then came the day of the betrothal ceremonies. Perhaps those of Mary were celebrated in the place where she had lived up till then, in some room of the buildings attached to the Temple. The families and some witnesses generally assisted at this ceremony. The promised husband gave to the young girl's father, or to some near relative who stood in place of him, a ring or some other precious gift intended for his promised bride; this sign, and

[1] Prayer of the Patronage of St Joseph.

[2] "Ad secundum, dicendum quod beata Virgo, antequam contraheret cum Joseph, fuit certificata divinitus quod Joseph in simili proposito erat; et ideo non se commisit periculo nubens." St Thomas on the fourth book of the Sentences, dist. xxx., quest. ii., art. 1, solution 2, *ad* 2^um^.

the words which accompanied it, constituted a definite engagement. From that moment, in fact, the betrothed belonged to each other, and had almost all the rights and duties of married people.[1] However, before accomplishing the third act, that is to say, of entering into their common habitation, they had still to wait a whole year, each living in the house of their relatives, and only communicating with each other through an intermediary, called " the friend of the betrothed." Mary was probably an orphan, and we have not been able to discover whether, during that year of waiting, the Temple could be considered as her paternal home, or whether she was confided to the care of some near relatives.

[1] Many modern authorities say, all the rights. They consider the Hebrew betrothal as equivalent to marriage, and recognise only a simple formality in the introduction of the wife into her husband's house. We are so imperfectly informed as to the Jewish customs that it would be hazardous to absolutely reject this opinion ; it is possible that it may have been the custom, at least at this particular epoch, and in Galilee. However, I know of no solid proof that such was the case ; and since it is wise to accept, in default of better, the teachings drawn a little later from the Talmud, I must say that the opinion of these numerous interpreters appears to me difficult to reconcile with the prohibition of free intercourse to the betrothed, and with Jewish law as expounded by Buxtorf (*de spon salibus et divortio* n. 64, 66, 68, in Ugolino's *Thesaurus*, t. xxx. p. lxxv.), and with the formula of the benediction of the betrothed (Ugolino's *Thesaurus*, t. xxx. p. ccclxx). This is why I place before the Annunciation, Mary's introduction into the house which she was to occupy with Joseph. Modern authorities, from whom I believe it is my duty to differ, place this latter ceremony after the Annunciation, and interpret in this sense St Matthew's use of the word *παρέλαβεν*, which I shall explain in another way in the following chapter.

The twelve months passed by, and at Nazareth, since that was where they were to live, the marriage proper was celebrated. Towards the evening the bridegroom, attended by ten companions, went to seek his promised wife, who awaited him in the midst of ten young girls. When he appeared, these lighted their lamps, and a procession was formed; and in the glow of this illumination, and to the sound of flutes and tambours, the bride was conducted to the house of her husband, where the marriage feast was held. This solemn introduction into the dwelling of the bridegroom was, according to Jewish custom, the act by which the marriage was completed.

In that humble family in a little town of Galilee, the traditional ceremonies were probably celebrated in perfect simplicity. Joseph and Mary, following the order of the divine will, each pledged to the other their affection, and, in the midst of the earthly festivities, they raised their hearts towards Him, who, alone, should entirely possess them.

When the period of the modest family rejoicings was over, they settled down in the house which they were to inhabit. Those who place her cradle in Nazareth, say that it was Mary's house, and actually the same in which she was born.

However, since it appears rather more probable that her birth-place was Jerusalem, perhaps it is also more likely that the house at Nazareth belonged to Joseph. He would thus have not only received Mary in his home for the ceremony of the marriage, but he would there have protected and made a home for her.

Sheltered towards the north by the hill upon which the town is built, and facing south, the humble dwelling had one chief apartment—the *Santa Casa*, as it is rightly named—no doubt the room which in the houses of people in humble circumstances, served for meals and the daily life in common. This room opened on to one or several other smaller rooms, built, partly at least, into the rock. One of these apartments, the large, or more likely one of the smaller, served as Mary's chamber. Joseph, and later, Jesus, also took their rest in that holy dwelling; but following the custom of the country, the workshop was separate from the house, and situated at some little distance.

In the midst of the wide-spread corruption, that humble roof attracted the attention and the grace of heaven. Mary pleased God by her merits, and favourably disposed Him towards the world by her prayers. We cannot doubt that the divine motherhood must, in the fitness of things, have been accompanied by the highest virtues, the most perfect spiritual deeds, and the best preparation possible for a human being. Mary had at least done all that a mere creature could do to render herself less unworthy. Possessed, from the beginning, of wondrous graces, she had been marvellously faithful. At that stage to which she had attained, she deserved, not in strict justice, but so far as was possible and fitting, the divine motherhood.[1] In other terms, suppos-

[1] It is commonly said by theologians that she merited the divine motherhood not *de condigno*, but *de congruo*.

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ing that God desired to have a mother, Mary was, as much as any woman perhaps, worthy of being that mother, and her saintliness invited that honour. At the same time, her humble petitions for the salvation of the world, perfect, and more pleasing to heaven than those of all the righteous men of old, had sufficient power to hasten the fulfilment of the promise. God intended to give the Messiah to the world at the time determined by His wisdom; but that eternal wisdom, whose decrees take our requests so largely into account, had ordained that time in the foreknowledge of Mary's prayers; and the time thus fixed was sooner, and was chosen with a more perfect fitness, than if Mary had not prayed.

All was prepared for the great event. Zacharias and Elisabeth had already by a miracle been given a child in whom the spirit of Elijah lived again, that he might prepare for the Lord a reawakened people. And his birth had been announced by Gabriel, one of the angels who stand before the face of God.

There was the strongest reason why the Incarnation of the Word should be announced to Mary. It was necessary on account of the greatness of the work, and the dignity of the Son, and also because of the part the mother must take in the divine scheme.

The Father, in uniting His Word to a human being, "celebrated the nuptials of His Son." At that hour of betrothal, Mary had to answer in the name of mankind and of all creation, that she accepted the honour of the divine union. It

was to obtain this acquiescence that an ambassador was sent to her from heaven.

At an earlier period, believing in the words of a fallen angel, the first woman broke the relations between God and the earth, and presented to man the fruit by means of which he and all his race found death. Receiving with all her faith and love the words of an angel of light, the new Eve re-established the alliance, and by her fruit gave life to the world.

Other mothers bring into the world a son of whose destiny they are ignorant, and if later, by acts of his own independent will, that son accomplishes great things, his mother is said to have given to her country a leader or a benefactor. Jesus was to be Mary's gift in a different way. Enlightened as to His Person and the object of His advent, she had to declare of her free will whether she was willing to become His mother; and her consent, given willingly and in full knowledge, not only assured her physical co-operation in the Incarnation, but also rendered her gloriously responsible for the consequences of that mystery, and united her will to all the work of redemption by her Son. Thus the discourse she held with the angel, so simple in its grandeur, so brief in its supreme importance, made her for ever, in the love and gratitude of mankind, associated with their Saviour.

"In the sixth month," after the conception of John the Baptist, writes St Luke,[1] "the angel Gabriel

[1] St Luke i. 26-38; the passage commented upon in the following pages.

was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused[1] to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." The angel appearing in human form, "came in unto her," doubtless inside her dwelling "where, the door being shut, she prayed to the Father in secret";[2] and, bending with profound respect before his queen, he addressed to her this salutation from God: "Hail," or rather, according to the Oriental formula, Peace be unto thee, "thou that art highly favoured." Gabriel gave no other name to Mary than "thou that art highly favoured," and is it not her own and incommunicable name? "The Lord is with thee," by His love poured into thy heart, by His Spirit who directs thee, by His power which is about to overshadow thee, by His wisdom, and by His Word which thou hast conceived in thy soul before conceiving Him in thy womb. "Blessed art thou among women."

And when she heard such praises as these addressed to her, a humble virgin, she instinctively and with more than natural prudence "was troubled at his saying." God had never before said so great a thing to any human being,[3] and she "cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

[1] St Luke here uses the word *ἐμνηστευμένη*, which signifies "espoused," and he uses it again (ii. 5) in connection with a time when, according to general belief, the last ceremony of marriage had certainly been celebrated. It would seem then that he desired to express by this word the special conditions of this virgin union.

[2] St Bernard: *super missus est homilia iii* (PL. clxxxiii. 71).

[3] See Origen upon this passage (PG. xiii. 1815-16).

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God," and not as in the case of other righteous people, merely for thyself alone, but thou hast found grace which will be the beginning of the salvation of the world. "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;[1] and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

Divine revelations are rarely expressed in a methodical and didactic form like that of a treatise. They are usually profound and luminous affirmations in which faith at once seizes the whole truth, which it develops and manifests by meditation. Thus, Gabriel did not explain to Mary the complete theology of the Incarnation; but in a few words he delivered to her the whole substance of it; and by allusion to the promises made to David, to the prophecies of Isaiah, of Daniel, and of the Psalms,[2] he disclosed to her the whole import of it. He who should be born of her would be God: His name of "Son of the Highest" would indicate this, as would also the perpetuity of His reign, which could not apply to mere human nature; that kingdom through all ages without end, promised to David

[1] The Greek *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας* is equally well rendered in the Vulgate by *in æternum*, its equivalent in biblical language.

[2] See 2 Samuel vii. 8-17; Psalms lxxxix. and cxxxii.; Isaiah vii. and ix.; Daniel vii. (especially 13, 44, 27).

through a long succession of descendants, is here assured in the person of Jesus. He would be man nevertheless, for David is called His father. And therefore He is a man, the Son, whom Mary shall conceive and bring forth. His work is stamped by his terrestrial name: Yahveh, Jesus[1]; and it is expressed in the prophecies from which the angel borrowed the terms: the long expected Son, the King to whom belongs the throne of David, the Ruler of the eternal kingdom. He is the Messiah who should save Israel, uniting it under His sceptre with the regenerated nations of the earth, and putting His people in possession of all the blessings of the "kingdom of God."

Mary had been instructed beforehand upon the mysteries of the Word incarnate, and upon the meanings of the prophecies; and at that moment, illumined by the divine light, she was enabled to penetrate into the very depths and to the farthest bounds of the import of the angelic message. She saw herself then, without the least doubt, chosen to be the mother of the God-Messiah, and she believed without any hesitation in the fulfilment of all that which the Lord had commanded him to say. One single point required an explanation, and her mind seized on it at once, for it concerned her dearest treasure. The virginity which she had promised to God would not be imperilled by the motherhood of the Word; an explicit prophecy, which she knew

[1] *Jehôšua'*, or in an abridged form *Jêšûa'*, formed by apocope from the divine name and the verb *yâša'*, which in the *hiphil* form signifies *saviour*.

well, guaranteed to her its marvellous preservation. But what must she do in order that the miracle might be accomplished?[1] Wisely and discreetly Mary said to the angel: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

In apprising Mary that her relative was also to become a mother,[2] God was preparing for the mysteries of the visitation. Thus, the miracle accomplished in Elisabeth was a confirmation and a sign leading up to the greater miracle, announced long before, and now upon the point of fulfilment; the one was as easy as the other to the Omnipotent. And the Virgin could make no other choice than to deliver herself up to the power of the Lord.

Though Gabriel had given his message yet he did

[1] Many suppose that Mary was surprised to hear the angel speak of maternity, and that she asked how that which he had announced to her could be reconciled with her vow. The explanation that I give seems to be truer and to accord better with what is known of the Virgin Mary. It is besides, that of the best interpreters, for instance, Saint Ambrose among the ancient, and P. Knabenbauer (*in Lucam*, p. 67-68) among modern authorities.

[2] Mary had probably not been informed of it by her relative, who had retired into silence and retreat (St Luke i. 24, 25).

not depart. He waited to hear the consent of her to whom he had just announced the Divine intention. We have neither the power nor the insight to form any idea of what passed at that moment through the mind of Mary. In the crowd of her thoughts there was the clear prevision of ineffable honour and inexpressible suffering. And she, so accustomed to forget herself, had no thought for the one or for the other; beyond all those rapturous or terrible visions, she gazed in spirit on God alone; she loved Him, and through Him she loved the salvation of the world. Collecting her thoughts Mary said, with a gesture of modesty and love, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

And at the same instant, whilst she became wrapped in a contemplation which illuminated the mystery,[1] the three divine Persons wrought in her the Incarnation. Of the most pure substance of the mother, the Holy Ghost formed the immaculate body of the Son. As God, shadowing with a cloud the ark and the Tabernacle, descended there aforetime in an especial presence, so the Word, Power of God,[2] takes possession of His new Tabernacle;

[1] Mary had at that moment, a vision of the divine essence itself, if that vision can be accorded in this life to a mere human creature—a much-discussed question in theology; at least she had a vision of God as grand as may be seen by mortal eyes. See Suarez: *Mystères du Christ*, t. II., disp. ix., sect. 2, to end.

[2] Most commentators and theologians understand by the "Power of the Highest," the Holy Ghost, and interpret the second part of the angel's phrase in the same sense as the first. Others, less numerous, but I believe, more exact, think that here, as in other passages of Scripture, the "Power of the Highest" is

and the cloud in which He now envelops Himself is that body fashioned by the Holy Ghost, that soul created at the same time, that humanity, in short, which He took upon Himself by uniting it in intimate dependence with His divine being. The Father is with Him, eternally engendering Him, and through all generations sending Him into the world; the human nature, which exists in the Divine Person, partakes of the same Sonship; and that Holy Thing which Mary now conceives, and which shall soon be born of her, will be called throughout time and eternity, the Son of God.

The Son of God made man is the price of our redemption, and of all the mercies bestowed upon the world; and the Father, before sharing this treasure among His creatures, confided it entirely to Mary. A stream of mercies descends upon the threshing-floor of the Father of mankind; and Mary, like the mysterious fleece, is the first to be impregnated with it, and contains in herself the source of it. Christ is the Head whose influence animates all the members incorporated in His unity; and Mary, who conceived the Head, with the object of giving Him to the members, conceived with Him all that the mystical body contained in its vital energy. Christ, Son of her virgin flesh, lies in her womb, and already the brothers of Christ, of whom in spirit she becomes the mother, repose also in her love.

the Son. St Thomas accepts the second explanation (Part 3, question xxxii., art. 1, *ad* 1[um]). In his commentary on this article, Suarez quotes other authors who have held the same opinion.

Before the mother of God and the mother of grace, Gabriel bowed with more respect than when he entered. And "he departed from her," leaving her prostrated in ecstasy, giving thanks to God, and humiliating herself profoundly before Him.

## CHAPTER V

THE VISITATION—THE INCARNATION ANNOUNCED TO SAINT JOSEPH — THE BIRTH OF JESUS (25 DECEMBER, 6 (?) B.C.).

TOWARDS Mary, as towards the cause of a new order of things, and towards the great "event of all the ages," the inhabitants of heaven and hell, the generations who had preceded her, and those who were to follow now turned.[1] By consenting to the Incarnation, she had responded to the hope of all people, and became the central point which divided into two parts the history of the world.

This same point marked the centre of her life. From thence came all her greatness; and all the guidance of Providence on her account had reference to this. Up to this time she was preparing to be, and from this time forward she was, the mother of God. From this time, in virtue of her own free *fiat*, which had given her an active part in the whole work of redemption, she is united to her Son in all His mysteries, and by the side of the necessary and all-sufficing Saviour, she is, in a lesser degree, the co-partner with Christ in the work of salvation.

[1] Saint Bernard ; *in festo pentecostes sermo* ii. PL. clxxxiii. 328).

And the moment when she joined her will to the redeeming will of God, was the chief moment of her co-operation. It was also the starting point of everything else, and it was the hour in which her personal action was the most important. The whole work was accomplished from Nazareth to Calvary, and the two persons who commenced it, found themselves together at that sad moment when it was completed. Mary was to have a great part in the consummation, but she had a still greater part in the beginning. At the end, Mary would be at the foot of the Cross, united with Jesus, and giving spiritual birth to the elect; but it is Jesus above all, the only Saviour, that one sees in the act of reconciling the world to God. At the beginning, on the contrary, though He must always be the principal actor, Jesus hides Himself in Mary and allows her to appear alone; and at first she is really alone, for Jesus only entered into the world when her co-operation both physical and moral introduced Him there. Thus it is that her own work is truly the beginning of salvation, as that of Eve had been the beginning of all ruin.

In the soul of Mary the moment of the conception of the Word operated as a transformation—in the meaning in which the most holy souls can be "changed from glory to glory,"[1] and draw nearer without ceasing towards the boundless ideal. This was, say theologians, the moment of the second sanctification. Grace had been obtained by the exceptionally meritorious act of the *Ecce ancilla;*

[1] 2 Corinthians iii. 18.

grace, probably superadded to merit, as a last and final preparation for the divine motherhood; grace of confirmation in spotless sanctity, as a new claim to that motherhood, now real and effective by contact with the Holy of Holies; and by this contact and personal presence of the Word, a new over-flowing of life into the soul of the mother.

With this second sanctification appears, one may well believe, a special feature of the spiritual gifts made to Mary. Theology calls grace "abounding," that which is given to the righteous in view not only of his own sanctification but for the sanctification of others through him. In Jesus and in Mary, who, each in their degree, have an influence upon the spiritual world, there is grace "super-abounding," that is to say, given in view of the sanctification of all. And, now that Mary has become mother, this character of fruitfulness in grace begins to be manifest in her.

She remained only a short time to adore, alone and silently, the invisible guest of Nazareth. "And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda,"[1] to visit Elisabeth. Her humble and attentive love suggested that she should go to her cousin, to gladden her by her presence and help her with her services. And, above all, Jesus, who lived in her, wished to give Himself through her to His Forerunner. That would be the first fruits of His sanctifying mission; and in that first work, the type of those which

[1] St Luke i. 39-56; the passage commented on in the following pages.

followed, He showed that His mother is the intermediary and distributer of His blessings.

It was at the end of March, at the time of the feast of the Passover. Companies of pilgrims set out each day for Galilee. Probably enough, Joseph and Mary travelled together as far as Jerusalem. From thence Mary had only about four-and-a-half miles to journey towards the south-west, where she expected to find her relative. Joseph appears not to have accompanied her as far as Kârem, the Aïn-Karim of to-day.[1]

The journey was quickly made. Her footsteps were hastened by loving eagerness, and by virgin modesty which did not permit her to linger in public and in the crowd, and above all was she hastened by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which admitted of no delay.[2] The valleys and the hills clothed with their flowers, scented with perfumes, and bearing their native fruits made, as it were, a mystic decoration for that first awakening of grace. In nature, and in the depths of the heart of the Virgin, there was a melody, that of the bridegroom inviting

[1] The dwelling of Zacharias and Elisabeth is placed by some at Kârem, to-day called 'Aïn-Karim, by others at Hebron, and by others at Juttah (written also Youttah, Jota, Jéta), in the vicinity of Hebron. The opinion favourable to 'Aïn-Karim cannot be regarded as trustworthy. It appears, however, to be the one most favoured by tradition; and if I am not mistaken, it is that most commonly accepted by the explorers of to-day. It would seem, according to the facts, that Joseph was not present at the meeting of Elisabeth and Mary; it is therefore most probable that he did not accompany the Holy Virgin to the end of her journey.

[2] See St Ambrose upon this passage from St Luke (PL. xv. 1560).

his well-beloved to come to rest, and to pour out something of the wealth of her heart:—

My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Ṛise up, my love,
My fair one, and come away.
For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;
The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.

Arise, my love,
My fair one, and come away,
Oh my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret places of the stairs,
Let me see thy countenance,
Let me hear thy voice;
For sweet is thy voice,
And thy countenance is comely.[1]

The voice of Mary came to gladden the dwelling where Elisabeth and Zacharias lived in retreat. Local tradition says that at that time they were inhabiting a house in the country, a short distance from Kârem. Mary "entered into the house of Zacharias," and, in all likelihood, as her cousin came forward to meet her, she, always humble and ready to anticipate another's wishes, first "saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb." The grace of Jesus, borne upon the words of His mother, had touched the

[1] Solomon's Song ii. 10-14; passage included in the Office of the Visitation, 2nd July.

child destined to a ministry so high and of such perfect holiness; the intelligence of the Forerunner, awakened momentarily at least, already turned towards Him to whom later he would bear witness; at the moment when the Lamb of God washed away from his soul the sin of humanity, and poured into him His Holy Spirit, he saluted Him by a joyful leaping.[1]

The grace, which had first touched him, was now poured out upon his mother. "Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost; and she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

God, by His angel, had revealed to Mary the mercy vouchsafed to Elisabeth, and now, by the direct inspiration of His Spirit, He manifested to Elisabeth the mercy vouchsafed to Mary. The wife of Zacharias bowed before her young relative; and just as, later, John declared himself unworthy to unloose the latchet of His shoe, she now proclaimed

[1] The angel, in announcing the birth of John the Baptist, had said (St Luke i. 15): "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." This text, and its traditional interpretation, admit no doubt that John had been always truly justified and sanctified. The most common opinion is that he had miraculously recognised the presence of the Saviour.

that she did not deserve the honour of receiving the mother of her Lord under her roof; and anticipating, in that moment of divine inspiration, the worship of all the ages, she praised Mary for her faith in the mystery of God, for the blessing which she had received above all women, and for the benediction which she would give to the world by the fruit of her womb.

In taking Elisabeth into His divine confidence, God commanded Mary to break her silence. She poured out the rich treasure, which, since the visit of the angel, meditation had accumulated in her heart. It was ineffable gratitude for the mercy she had received. She had a clear insight of that mercy, and, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, she even prophesied its most glorious consequences to herself. But she saw it all, even as the blessed see their glory, in a light which renders the least pride impossible, and which turns the soul entirely towards Him, from whom all good descends. The thought of the mercifulness of God, eternally faithful to those who believe Him, stirred her to the contemplation of the divine judgments; she comprehended them in their universality, such as they had already been shown in the ancient Law, such as they had been revealed in herself, such as the grace of the New Testament was about to manifest them; and that which God revealed of them to her at that moment, threw her into an ecstasy like that which Jesus experienced when He thanked the Father that He had hidden Himself from the prudent and revealed Himself unto babes. Finally, returning to the mercy of the

Incarnation, that source of all others, she glorified God for having accomplished His design, and having, according to His promise, given Himself to the world through Israel. Mary said:—

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden:
For, behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath done to me great things;
And holy is His name.

And His mercy is on them that fear Him
From generation to generation.

He hath shewed strength with His arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
And exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;
And the rich He hath sent empty away.

He hath holpen His servant Israel,
In remembrance of His mercy;

As He spake to our fathers,
To Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

Mary had nurtured her soul on the Holy Scriptures till they had become her thoughts, and she now recalled their phrases without effort. And at that moment she naturally employed the rhythmical language which was used by the poets and Hebrew prophets. Her words, which perhaps she herself

arranged later in a regular poetic form,[1] were preserved in the holy family before becoming the inheritance of the Church. It is the Song of Mary. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, the victorious Deborah and Judith, and numerous other persons in the Old Testament have sung of the special mercies of God towards themselves and towards His people. In the New Testament, three canticles celebrate the Incarnation of the Saviour. The first and the most beautiful is that in which it pleased Jesus to be greeted by His mother. This song is singularly precious, for it contains the only lengthy utterance that we have from her. Her heart is there revealed to us, humble, filled with thoughts of God, and quickened already with the spirit of her Son. The inspiration in it is grand and serene. There are no violent emotions like those of the prophets, upon whom the divine Spirit descended at intervals; it is rather the tranquil influence of grace in a soul which is possessed in entire peace by the Holy Spirit.

The scene which took place upon the threshold of Zacharias's house gives us some idea of the intercourse between the two relatives during Mary's visit, and also of the graces showered by God upon that home. It was not only because of her affection for Elisabeth that Mary remained under her roof, but

[1] That Mary spoke at first in a free poetic rhythm, and afterwards arranged her words in the form of a canticle, is an hypothesis which has some appearance of truth, but it is evidently pure hypothesis. Unfortunately we do not possess the Aramaic text of the *Magnificat*, and we know it only through the Greek prose of St Luke.

for the spiritual welfare of the Forerunner and of his mother. Grace flowed, like a mysterious unction, upon the future champion of Christ, for whom such valiant struggles were waiting.[1] Elisabeth and Mary were edified and increased in the love of God by confiding to each other the great mercies they had received. The righteous Zacharias also, by such intercourse upon the subject of those wonders of grace as his infirmity permitted, nourished the silent meditation to which he was temporarily condemned.

Mary abode with her cousin about three months, that is to say, almost up to the time of the expected birth. Did she depart before or after the happy event? Did she remain till the birth of the child, and retire before the arrival of visitors? These are questions much discussed and extremely uncertain. Some authorities favour the belief that Mary stayed till after the birth. It is thus quite possible that John, in the first hours of his life, had the happiness of lying in the arms of Our Lady, near to the Master whom he had recognised at once.

Eight days after, relatives and neighbours flocked to Kârem to congratulate Elisabeth, and to welcome the newly born child on the occasion of his formal reception into the people of Israel.[2] In the midst of the festival Zacharias's tongue was suddenly loosened; the Holy Ghost inspired him, and he also praised and magnified the Lord who visited and redeemed His people, and prophesied the high destiny of his

[1] St Ambrose upon this passage of St Luke (PL. xv. 1562).
[2] St Luke i. 57-79.

son, who should be called "prophet of the Highest"; he sung above all of another person, the mysterious messenger, the Saviour, the Lord before whose face John was sent to prepare the way. The guests at Kârem were filled with righteous fear and admiration. They asked: "What manner of child shall this be?" and they were answered by these strange words: "He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of His servant David. . . . Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us. . . ." And if Mary was still there, the words that John said later were already fulfilled: "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not."[1] The humble daughter of David, in whom He was hidden, disappeared into the midst of the crowd, and the questioning glances which were exchanged among them did not fall upon the young wife of the carpenter of Nazareth.

Mary "returned to her own house,"[2] and with Joseph resumed her life of work and prayer. By degrees, however, the signs of her motherhood became apparent, and necessarily they attracted the attention of Joseph.[3] He had such faith in Mary's virtue, however, that he could not, in spite of appearances, entertain any suspicions which could cast dishonour upon her. Not only was her virtue

[1] St John i. 26. [2] St Luke i. 56.

[3] St Matthew i. 18-25; in the following pages the text is explained according to the opinion which appears to be the most probable.

witnessed by all her life and conduct; God Himself had attested it, by the care which Providence had taken to insure her that virgin marriage. And the circumstances of that marriage, and the evident holiness of his wife, recalled a prophecy well known among pious Jews, which made Joseph strongly inclined to believe that he had in his home the Virgin mother of the Messiah. But a sign or witness was needed to confirm as a certainty this conjecture of his mind. Then, said he in his humility, if Mary was the Virgin expected by all Israel, was he worthy to receive the Messiah into his house? What course must he take in this great matter? And he was greatly troubled. For, when one is deeply concerned and desires full enlightenment, it is a grievous pain to be in ignorance.

In spite of the profound sadness which the thought of separation caused him, it appeared to him that he could not, in such circumstances, live with Mary. "Being a just man," he believed in her innocence, and consequently "not willing to make her a publick example," nor to expose to criticism that which he rightly supposed to be a divine mystery,[1] he thought of dissolving the bond of his marriage as secretly as possible. He would deliver Mary again into those divine hands which had up till then guided her, and which he believed would still take care of her.

A word from the Virgin would have sufficed to

[1] "Joseph, knowing Mary's virtue, and marvelling at what had happened, wrapped in silence that mystery of which he was ignorant. . . ." St Jerome upon this passage (PL. xxvi. 24).

extricate her husband from the perplexities which she certainly guessed, and which were no less sad for her. She was assured that she would be believed; and perhaps, had she been guided by ordinary prudence, that word would have been said. But a higher wisdom inspired her to respect the heavenly secret; it was the most delicate propriety that the confidence should not come from her; it was for God to command Joseph to retain his place and his mission near the Messiah, and God would know how to do it at the proper time. She waited and she prayed. This silence was worthy of the wise and prudent Virgin, who, possessing herself in peace, gave herself up entirely to God.

Nothing is more mysterious and at the same time more sure than the guidance of God for those who seek His way and have confidence in Him. Sometimes He shows them the way to be taken, without saying where it will lead them; sometimes He indicates the end beforehand, without instructing them as to the way; sometimes He leaves to their own judgment the choice of the direction they will take; and finally, He sometimes confirms, and sometimes amends the choice of human wisdom, taking His faithful by the hand, and leading them into the right path.

"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus:

for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

Thus the celestial vision assured Saint Joseph of the two things which it was necessary that he should know definitely. From the very first, the mystery accomplished in Mary was wholly divine, and the work of the Holy Ghost; and the Son whom she would bring into the world, was truly He who was to deliver Israel from their sins, the promised Saviour, God with us. Therefore, Joseph's duty must be to remain with her as God had already indicated to him, in uniting him to Mary. The Virgin, thus singularly blessed, must belong to him by right of his most pure marriage. In the eyes of men he would then be the father of the child; even his genealogy would be for them a sign by which they might recognise the origin of the Messiah, and indeed, the angel had been careful to call him, "Joseph, son of David." His paternal rights would not exist solely in the opinion of the world, they would be real, founded on the natural order of things by the will of God. Because the field was his, to him also belonged the treasure which heaven had hidden there, the flower which it should bear. And God commanded him to exercise his authority by bestowing upon the child the name of Jesus.

"Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto

him his wife."[1] Never was an awaking more joyful, never was any meeting sweeter than that of Mary and Joseph on the morning of that day. The secret which, for a moment, had isolated the one from the other, was now revealed to them both, and renewed and multiplied all the happiness of their union and intimacy. Joseph repeated to Mary the words of the angel; Mary recounted to him the scene of the Annunciation and the divine consolations of Kârem. From that time forward, Jesus was the only object of their thoughts, their converse, and their anticipations.

But this Jesus, who was to die upon the cross, sought a still poorer and more inconvenient lodging in which to be born than the humble dwelling at Nazareth. Besides, according to an ancient prophecy, the Messiah must come from Bethlehem. Joseph, and especially Mary, could not have been ignorant of that prophecy, since well-informed Israelites knew of it.[2] But in this as in all other things they committed themselves to God's guidance, and, without knowing how that which was written would be fulfilled, they waited for a sign of His will.

This time the indication came by means of outside events and from a political cause. It was also

[1] Joseph had hesitated; he had asked himself whether Mary truly belonged to him, and had believed it his duty to separate himself from her. The angel told him to take her without fear, to receive her definitely in a tranquil and assured union, and Joseph did so. Such appears to be, in verses 20 and 24, the meaning of the word *παραλαβεῖν*.

[2] Micah v. 2; St Matthew ii. 4-6.

expedient that the history of the world should be interwoven with that of the birth of the Saviour. Already, in view of His reign, the supremacy among nations had passed from the oriental kingdoms to an empire still more vast and more firmly established; and in the year 746 of the Roman Empire, the eighth year before our era, Augustus had closed the temple of Janus. Thus the Roman unity and peace announced and prepared for the coming of peace and unity in Christ.

"And it came to pass in those days,[1] that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. This taxing," made or at least concluded by Cyrenius, has kept alive the name of this governor; he is named as the taker of the first census, which "was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.[2] And all went to be taxed," according to the custom of the Jews approved by the Roman power, "every one into his own city" or birthplace. "Joseph also," always submissive to authority, as to God from whom it is derived, started on his journey, and "went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David), to be taxed, with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child."[3]

[1] St Luke ii. 1-20; the passage commented on in the following pages.

[2] Concerning the numerous questions relating to Quirinius (such is the true form of his name), and to the two censuses of which he had the direction, see the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, art. Cyrinus, or other recent works.

[3] I have endeavoured in this translation to render exactly the

She also, perhaps, may have been upon the lists of the census, for it is not improbable that in certain cases women were obliged to be registered, and she would have a special claim as the only daughter and heiress of Joachim.

Joseph and Mary travelled then towards Jerusalem, which it was necessary to pass through to reach Bethlehem, situated two hours to the south of the holy city. Winter and the encumbrances of the travellers made the way more difficult. Perhaps they went on foot, perhaps Mary, as she is so often represented, rode on an ass. Her veil was lowered over her face which was wonderfully modest and meditative. Without doubt she communed with the Wisdom of the Father, who reposed in her, and was humble in the thought that she bore within her the Son of God, and that soon she would see Him and hold Him in her arms. She and Joseph remained wrapped in a silence of contemplation and expectation. And, if to their hearts there came echoes of the psalms so often chanted on that same road, what a new meaning and savour there would be to them in the aspirations towards the presence of the Lord and towards the God who would glorify Israel by the light of His countenance. All around them, however, was the noise of the passing of the indifferent crowd. Is it not thus that the multitude generally passes without seeing God?

God who came to visit His people, "came unto His

text of St Luke, which does not say clearly whether Mary came for the purpose of being registered.

own and His own received Him not."[1] The inn at Bethlehem was full. Perhaps the wealthy might even then have gained an entrance, but for the humble artisan and his companion there was no room. In compassion someone pointed out to them a little distance away, a grotto hollowed out from the face of the rock; it served, or had served, for a stable, and might shelter the poor couple for a time. Sweetly resigned and, in spite of the inhumanity of man, piously adoring the lovingkindness of God, they retired there, and Joseph endeavoured to make the place as little uncomfortable as possible for his saintly wife, and for Him whose coming would not be long delayed. In fact, so it was, that "while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." According to ancient tradition, this was a little after midnight on the 25th of December, probably a Sunday,[2] and in all likelihood the year 748 of the Roman era, six years before the commencement of the christian era."

Since, entirely exempt from the curse of Eve, she miraculously and virginally brought the Saviour into the world, it is probable that she was blessed with the most exalted rapture.[3] If any conjecture as to the secrets of her heart is permissible, may she not

1 St John i. 11.

2 A commonly accepted tradition, founded upon important testimony, says that the Incarnation (March 25) was on a Friday, and consequently the Nativity (December 25) was on a Sunday. See Suarez: *Mystères du Christ*, t. II., disp. xiii., sect. 4.

3 Perhaps the vision of the divine essence. See note on p. 88, and Suarez: *Mystères*, t. II., disp. xix., sect. 4.

have seen, in the splendour of God revealing Himself to her soul, that same mystery to which she contributed? The Father, who in the eternal present begets His son, God of God, Light of Light, begot Him at that hour in the new nature which was thenceforth inseparable from His Person. The Father begot His Son with her and by her, for that humanity which participates in the divine sonship was truly of her flesh and substance, just as the Person of the Word is of the substance of God; and with the Father she could say to that Person, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."[1] Her Son was the Lord of all angels, and the Father when He brought the first begotten into the world said: "Let all the angels of God worship him."[2] Her Son was the Light of the World, and from her proceeded that Light which illumined the darkness and dispersed the shadow of death.

Nevertheless, to bodily eyes, her "first-born"[3] and only son was a feeble infant, who, in her arms, trembled with the cold of night, and Mary "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes" that she had brought with her. There was no cradle in that poor stable; there was only a "manger," a kind of clay trough,[4] placed on wooden supports. There she "laid her Son," and falling on her knees beside Joseph, they offered Him the first worship of mankind.

[1] Psalm ii. 7.

[2] Hebrews i. 6; *cf.* Psalm xcvi. 7, in the Vulgate.

[3] In biblical language the first child born in a family is always called the "first-born," even though it should be an only child.

[4] See the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, article Crèche.

"And there were, in the same country," about a mile-and-a-quarter towards the East,[1] some "shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."[2]

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the

[1] According to local tradition the shepherds were in that direction, and at about that distance, but the exact spot is a matter of discussion.

[2] There is no doubt that the εὐδοχια of St Luke, and the *bona voluntas* of the Vulgate, is the good will of God towards men (see, for example, Knabenbauer: *in Lucam*, p. 122-4; and compare the meaning of εὐδοχια in the following passages: St Matthew xi. 26; St Luke x. 21; Ephesians i. 5, 9; Philippians ii. 13). Fouard (*Vie de Jésus-Christ*, 8°, 1880, p. 67), following up a suggestion of Bossuet, has proposed the rendering, "Paix sur la terre aux hommes chéris de Dieu!"

babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." These simple and obedient souls had no hesitation in recognising in the newly born infant their Lord and the Saviour of Israel. Mary, smiling in the joy of her miraculous motherhood, presented Him to them, and the information which she and Joseph wisely and discreetly gave them, confirmed that which the angels had told them. They worshipped the child, and perhaps relieved the necessities of the holy family by some presents, willingly offered from their poverty.

Then, possessed by the great joy that had been announced to them from Heaven, they did not leave Bethlehem till they had told the good tidings. Had not the angel said that the joy would be for all people? "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Finally, the happy "shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen," for all had been, "as it was told unto them," by the heavenly messengers.

And Mary, beside the manger, tasted the unspeakable joy of beholding her Son, the joy of having heard the angels sing of His coming, the joy of having seen kneeling before Him in that first hour His well-beloved, the poor and simple of the earth. She "kept all these things, and pondered" on all the circumstances "in her heart." And from time to time, leaning over the infant

who smiled at her, "she gave Him more than a mother's kisses, for they were the kisses of a virgin mother.[1]"

[1] Bossuet, *sermon sur le Rosaire*, 1651 (Lebarq, t. i., p. 79), and the first *sermon pour la Nativité de la Sainte Vierge*, 1652 (*ibid.* p. 171).

## CHAPTER VI

THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE (1ST JANUARY AND 2ND FEBRUARY IN THE YEAR 5 ? B.C.)—THE SOJOURN AT BETHLEHEM—THE MAGI—THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—THE DEATH OF HEROD (PROBABLY THE YEAR 4 B.C.)—THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

"WHEN eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child," [1] the Saviour was brought to the synagogue at Bethlehem and there received the sign of the covenant. In the circumstances in which these poor travellers were situated there could be no question of making this day a joyous occasion for a family meeting, as was the usual custom. Zacharias and Elisabeth were in all probability the only relatives who could be invited, for from Bethlehem to Kârem, and from these two towns to Jerusalem, was only a few miles distance. It is therefore possible that the holy priest and his wife, being forewarned by grace some months before, may have come to assist Mary and Joseph, to adore the new-born God, and, according to the good-pleasure of the Holy Spirit, to behold something of the mystery of the circumcision.

It was necessary that the Messiah should become

[1] St Luke ii. 21 ; verse commented on in the following pages.

one of the Jewish nation, for He was given first to Israel, and through Israel salvation was offered to the world. He must be put under the yoke of the Law, all the obligations of which were accepted by the circumcised. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.[1]" He must, as Redeemer, submit to the rite which symbolised the necessity of effort and struggle against sin. And thus was made that wonderful exchange in which the earth gives to the Son of God all its woes, to receive from Him in return all the treasures of heaven. He took upon Himself our humanity in the womb of the Virgin, to make us participators in His divinity; He made Himself subject to the law, that we might be delivered from the curse of the law against transgressors; He took the sign of the sons of Abraham, that we might be received as the sons of God by adoption; He took upon Himself that struggle and expiation which should fall to the lot of sinners, that He might bestow upon us His righteousness and His innocence.[2]

Thus, by the mouth of Joseph, "His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." This name of

[1] Galatians iv. 4, 5.

[2] "O admirabile commercium: Creator generis humani, animatum corpus sumens, de Virgine nasci dignatus est: et, procedens homo sine semine, largitus est nobis suam deitatem." Office of the Circumcision, first antiphon at Laudes.

Saviour, and the first drops of blood which He shed were the announcement, the promise, the symbol of the fruitful but austere mission which He came to fulfil. After the joy of the nativity, was not this day, for Mary, the day of the first tears? Her Son had already begun to suffer, and already she had a vague presentiment of His future griefs.

The thought of the redeeming sufferings were to be again recalled to Mary on another day, rich in mysteries, when God, by the announcement of great trials and of great consolations, touched her soul to its depths.

Before long, in fact, the forty "days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished.[1]" They then brought the Child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: every son, who is the first-born of his mother, shall be called holy to the Lord. They also offered "a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons." It was in view of such offerings that the sellers of pigeons and doves came at first round about the Temple, and in time by the negligence of the priests they were permitted to invade even the sacred precincts.

"And, behold, there was in Jerusalem, a man whose name was Simeon;[2] and the same man

[1] St Luke ii. 22-39; passage commented on in the following pages.

[2] Some writers have identified this holy person with Raban Simeon, son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel, the famous scribe, who was president of the Sanhedrim. This identification seems by

was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." And he came by the Spirit into the Temple at the moment when the parents of the Saviour "brought in the child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the law." [1]

Except for its modesty and air of meditation, there was nothing outwardly by which the holy family could be distinguished. But, guided by a divine instinct, the old man did not hesitate. Approaching with respect, he asked if he might be allowed to take the child: "Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God," that he had at last seen that for which his life had been prolonged; and he uttered these inspired words:—

"Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant
Depart in peace, according to Thy word;

For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

A light to lighten the Gentiles,
And the glory of Thy people Israel."

"And Joseph and His mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him." It was not that

no means certain, especially when one considers how common the name of Simeon was. This opinion, however, was held by Patrizi, *de evangeliis*, lib. III., dissert. xxvi., and is favourably presented by Fouard in his *Vie de Jésus-Christ*.

[1] The words of St Luke seem to indicate that the meeting with Simeon took place, not after the ceremony, but at the time when the holy family entered the Temple.

the words which burst forth from the heart of Simeon, as fervent and rhythmical as a song, could teach them anything about the Saviour; but it was marvellous to see how the Holy Ghost was revealing Him to the chosen souls, first to Elisabeth, then to the shepherds, now to Simeon, and to hear these witnesses chosen by God extol the wonders of the Incarnation and the Redemption. These mysteries which shew forth the divine wisdom and goodness, are such as the angels "desire to look into." [1] And Mary, whose insight and intelligence surpassed in many respects that of the angels, pondered on these mysteries with unspeakable feelings of gratitude and love; whoever spoke of them in her presence, especially if they spoke eloquently and under divine inspiration, awoke deep echoes in her soul, and threw her into an ecstasy of wonder and admiration.

Her emotion and that of Joseph was still further increased by the arrival of another person. This was "Anna," who was called "a prophetess," because the Holy Spirit had favoured her with revelations from on high. She was the "daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about four-score and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

However, Simeon had not yet said all that God

[1] 1 Peter i. 12.

had commanded him. He "blessed" the parents of Jesus, congratulating them upon the grace that had been vouchsafed to them, and desiring that new graces might be poured upon them. Then unto Mary His mother he said: "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Because the Messiah came to save men without doing violence to their free will, His work of salvation was to be, at the same time, a work of judgment. The life and light which He brought, would be bestowed on those who came to Him, but those who refused Him, would, by so doing, go to their own destruction. It would be necessary to take part for or against Him; strength would be given to every one to choose either the love of God or the love of self, which lies dormant in every heart, and thus to reveal his most secret thoughts. And, in that warfare which was to rage around Him, Jesus would have to suffer; His sufferings would be so great that, on His account, His mother's heart would be wounded as by a sword.

Undoubtedly, Mary already knew that the mission on which her Son came could not be accomplished without great sorrows, and those sorrows she expected to share with Him. But on this day it was God's will that she should have more precise and certain warning of that future; and He ordained that it should be announced to her, no longer as it had been already announced to all men, by the Scriptures

and the prophets, but by words addressed directly to herself, which struck her to the heart.

Could anything else so poison her life and wither all her happiness beforehand as to predict to a young mother even in the days of her first joy, that the son she held in her arms should one day be the cause to her of a sorrow as sharp and penetrating as a sword which pierces to the heart? How could she gaze at her child from thenceforth without thinking of the sufferings which awaited him? How could she give up her heart to the gladness and hope of a mother without immediately wounding it at the point of that sword always waiting to transfix it?

But Mary's heart was too great, too holy, too beloved by God, too carefully fashioned by the Holy Spirit, to be spared these sorrows. It was the heart of the Co-redeemer, it must therefore be like that of the Redeemer; and in that sacrificial feast of generous offerings, God Himself, by the wound which He made there, rendered more perfect that resemblance. In the heart of Jesus there were always the everlasting joys of love and the beatific vision of the salvation of the world; but there was always also the remembrance of the bitter cup, of unbelieving and lost souls, and of the cross. In Mary's heart was the happiness of contemplating her Son and her God, of loving Him, of receiving His smiles and His love, of knowing Him as the Saviour, the resurrection, and the life of all the righteous; but always also was there the bitter thought of the sorrow and strife.

At the words of Simeon this flood of bitterness penetrated to the soul of the Virgin, but without disturbing its profound peace. She continued on her tranquil way with Joseph, and, accompanied doubtless by the two saintly old people, she carried out the Mosaic rite to the end.

Virginal and pure as on the day when, not long before, she had left the Temple, even more virginal so to say, since she had become mother and the divine visit had consecrated her virginity, she placed herself humbly on a level with other people. She knew that humble obedience to the Law, and the faithful keeping of the Master's secret, would be pleasing to God. She went to kneel below in the court of the women,[1] and a priest descended towards her. She gave him, not a lamb of the first year, as richer women offered, but, according to the custom of the poor, two turtle doves or two young pigeons ; one for the burnt offering and the other "for a sin offering." The priest said over her the prescribed prayer, after which, remembering the infinite holiness of God, she prayed Him to make her more and more worthy in His eyes.

She rose and crossed the women's enclosure, for it was probably at the extremity of this enclosure, and at the point where it joined the men's enclosure, that the presentation of children was made. This presentation was a thank offering from the people of Israel; for, to deliver them, God had smitten the first-born of Egypt, and therefore Israel consecrated

[1] The woman who was to be purified probably occupied that place. The rest is the law of the purification (Leviticus xii.).

its first-born to the Lord.[1] But the offering of this day had quite another value and quite another character. The Child which was brought to the Temple, paid, by Himself alone, all the debt of gratitude both of the chosen people and of the whole world; He paid also the debt of original sin, and rendered to God all the homage for which the ancient sacrifices had not sufficed. "When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me; in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do Thy will, O God.[2]"

It was this Victim, which but lately the Virgin, praying in this same Temple, had ardently desired and asked of God for the world. Her desires had been granted; into her hands God had placed the sacred victim, and representing the whole world for whom that Victim had been given, Mary presented and consecrated it to God. A day would come—she had just now been reminded of it—when she would join with Him in His bloody sacrifice; to-day it was the adduction, that first act by which she, in whose name the sacrifice was offered, brought the victim before the Tabernacle, and placing her hand upon His head, there devoted Him to the service of God.[3]

The priest, of the sons of Aaron, took Jesus into

[1] Exodus xiii. 1, 2, 11-17; Numbers xviii. 15, 16; and elsewhere.

[2] Hebrews x. 5-7. Psalm xl. 6-8.

[3] Leviticus i. 2-4; iii. 1, 2; and elsewhere.

his arms, and turning towards the altar and the sanctuary, presented Him to the Lord.[1] Jesus again accepted His part of Pontiff and Victim, and in virtue of this, gave to His Father the only homage which is worthy of the divine majesty. Mary prayed God to receive her spotless offering, and, accepting for herself and for Jesus the stern decrees of Providence, she joined in the adoration, the love, and the sacrifice of her Son.

The child thus presented in the Temple was consecrated to the Lord; his life and services belonged to God and to the sanctuary if his parents did not redeem him by the offering of five shekels.[2] This redemption was the rule, and the oblation was therefore generally figurative. But on this day it was quite otherwise; the offering had been accepted, and the divine words "All the firstborn are mine"[3] were fulfilled in their entire significance. Mary completed the ceremony by giving the priest the five pieces of silver; but by His mission, as well as by His sonship, Jesus remained the Holy One of God.

If the holy family returned to Nazareth after the Presentation—and it is not at all certain that they did return there[4]—it was, doubtless, to arrange some urgent business, and for only a few days. For

[1] A probable conjecture concerning the rite of presentation.

[2] The shekel is a silver coin weighing 9 dwts. 9 gr. (about 2s. 8d.). Five shekels would therefore be worth rather more than thirteen shillings.

[3] Numbers iii. 13.

[4] *Cf.* Knabenbauer, *in Lucam*, ii. 39, with the authors quoted for the second explanation.

we have strong reasons for believing that they went then to settle at Bethlehem.[1] Perhaps Joseph, seeing that God had brought them there in order that the Messiah might be born in the town of David, thought that they ought to live there, at least till any indication to the contrary came to them from heaven. Whatever may have been the motives of this decision, it seems likely that the parents of Jesus remained at Bethlehem for several months, perhaps even the whole year that followed the birth of the Saviour.

They evidently did not spend that time in the stable which had at first served as a refuge for them. Mary was not even obliged to remain there during the forty days between the nativity and the purification. They inhabited some small house in the little town,[2] and lived there dependent upon their slender resources and the work of their hands.

In all likelihood they still held intercourse, perhaps frequently, with the parents of John the Baptist. They lived too near, and were too closely connected by blood and by the still stronger bond of grace, not to visit each other. Elisabeth and

[1] Concerning the sojourn of the holy family at Bethlehem, and the order of events, may be consulted, Cornely; *Introductio*, 1886, t. iii., p. 203-205; Knabenbauer: *in Matthæum*, ii., 1 and 22, p. 71-73 and 110. Briefly, the two principal reasons for accepting this sojourn, are: 1st. The great difficulty there would be in placing the presentation between the arrival of the magi and the flight into Egypt; 2nd. The intention which Saint Joseph had, on the return from Egypt, of living not in Galilee, but in Judea, which renders it probable that he had already settled there before the flight.

[2] St Matthew ii. 11.

Zacharias came under the humble roof at Bethlehem to adore the King of angels; or perhaps they relieved the poverty of their relatives by offering them for some days the hospitality of their own house; or they might sometimes have met in one of the numerous valleys which divide the mountains of Judea between Bethlehem and Kârem. During the first months of the life of Jesus, historic probability is in favour of those scenes of the "Holy Family" so often pictured by the piety of christian art; the righteous Joseph and the priest Zacharias conversing together upon the greatness of God and of His Law; the two mothers seated near each other, holding their children upon their knees, and binding yet closer the intimate bonds already formed between them by the love of God and the revelations of the Holy Spirit; Jesus smiling at Elisabeth and willingly allowing her to take Him, and holding out His arms towards His forerunner; John, six months older, trying to direct his first steps towards his Master, or sometimes, following the example of Jesus, allowing himself to be taken by Mary, and resting even more sweetly in her arms than in those of Elisabeth.

But already a trial was at hand to interrupt these days of happiness, and it followed closely on a further glorifying of the Messiah.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men,"[1] who were both great nobles and

[1] St Matthew ii. 1-12; passage commented on in the following pages.

scholars given up to the study of the stars, "into Jerusalem." The date of their coming is uncertain. The child Jesus was not yet two years old; He was perhaps only some weeks or some months old. Perhaps, as was sometimes said in olden times, these worshippers reached Bethelehem on the 25th of December, the anniversary of His birth; perhaps, and this is the opinion of many, the liturgical date of the feast is the same as that of the event; in which case it took place on the 6th of January of the year 750 of the Roman Empire, four years before our era, and the child Jesus would then have been one year and thirteen days old.[1]

The wise men came "from the countries of the East," perhaps from Assyria or Chaldea, but more probably from Media or Persia. A meteor, miraculously formed and appearing like a star,[2] was manifested to them, in all probability about the time of the birth of Jesus. Ancient traditions, or knowledge of the prophecies spread in the East by the Jews of the captivity, and above all the grace of God, had enabled them to interpret the heavenly sign; and, already prepared to worship the Ruler whom God had made to arise out of Judah, they

[1] At least according to the calculation followed here. Those who place the birth of the child Jesus a year sooner (25th December of the year 7) must place the Epiphany on 6th of January of the year 5. In any case and according to any calculation, the latest 6th of January possible is that which preceded by about three months the death of Herod.

[2] The only scientific opinion admissible (see Knabenbauer upon this passage, and *Dictionnaire ae la Bible*, art. Étoile des Mages), which is also that of St Thomas, p. 3, q. xxxvi., a. 7.

set out on their way, and quite naturally, it was to the capital they went to seek the new King. "Where," said they, "is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him."

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." He gathered together, if not all the Sanhedrim, at least "all the chief priests and scribes of the people," that is to say the official guardians of the knowledge of the Scriptures, and "demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.[1]

"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east," and which had since disappeared, suddenly reappeared before their eyes. Moving at the pleasure of the divine will through the lower strata of space, the meteor "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." Its reappearance brought the sweetest consolation and assurance to

[1] Micah v. 2.

the travellers. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." The ignorance and indifference which they had found at Jerusalem on the subject of the birth of the "King of the Jews," had, doubtless, affected them painfully; but the star, smiling from heaven, quickly dispersed that sorrowful impression. God was always with them, and continued to guide them; they had not deceived themselves in coming to Bethlehem to seek the Messiah.

Therefore the poverty of the dwelling over which the star rested did not make them hesitate, "and when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him."

Mary was the throne of this new-born King to whom the princes of the East paid worship. She had presided at the first manifestation of her Son, given to the Israelites, who were the first called, and to the poor, who were the most ready to come. She presided now at this second manifestation, in which Jesus showed Himself to the wise, to the great people of the world, and to the Gentiles; a manifestation which, like the first, and even in a greater degree perhaps, bore in it the type of the far-off future. For the wise, the rich, princes, and kings are called to the kingdom of God, and, if they are not the first to enter, they will come nevertheless in great numbers; the nations will quickly reap the inheritance rejected by Israel, and will thus form the principal body of the christian Church. All those who come will find, as on this day the wise

men found, God made man, in the arms of His mother. And on this day Mary presented Him and revealed Him to these first-fruits of the Gentiles.

Whether they spoke a Semitic language akin to the Hebrew of that time, whether they had the assistance of an interpreter, or whether on that day the gift of tongues was given to Mary, as later it was given to the apostles, it is generally supposed that the strangers held converse with the Virgin mother, and that she planted in their souls the germs of christian faith and holiness. Did not the spiritual character of their worship of the new-born Christ come from the teaching of Mary? Their prostration was, in fact, not merely the prostration which was customary at the courts of eastern monarchs; it was, according to common opinion, the recognition of His divinity.

Finally, they called their attendants to bring in their precious coffers, "and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." They presented to the incarnate God incense, which, among the Jews and among ancient nations generally, was the perfume of the temple and of the altar; by gold and myrrh they intended to honour the royal power which they had recognised from the first, and which, in truth, the Babe of Bethlehem possessed. Another symbolism, probably unknown to the wise men, but perhaps intended by God, was that myrrh foretold the death and burial of the Redeemer.

We do not know whether the princely visitors remained at Bethlehem only a day or a little longer.

But they stayed there at least one night. For it was in "a dream" that they were warned of God that they should not return to Herod. Therefore they avoided returning to Jerusalem, and going direct to the crossing of the Jordan, "they departed into their own country another way."

When the wise men "were departed,"[1] and doubtless, very soon after their departure, "behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt."

Herod, in fact, soon learned—for Bethlehem is less than two hours' distance from Jersualem—that he could not depend on the eastern princes for relief from his anxious jealousy. "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men." Every one in the little town would be able to tell the emissaries of the king before which house the brilliant caravan had stopped, and to add the precise time when the inhabitants of that house had disappeared. But one may well suspect the people of Bethlehem of prevarication, or

[1] St Matthew ii. 13-23; passage commented on in the following pages.

at least of connivance in hiding the formidable rival of Herod; and the children designated by the royal command, possibly half-a-hundred in number, were put to death. "Then was fulfilled," in a new fashion, "that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."[1] Of old, the wife of Jacob had mourned for her children when, God at that time chastening His people, the captives had been assembled in Rama, in preparation for exile to far-off Assyria. To-day, from her cavernous tomb on the road to Bethlehem, she could weep afresh over the children of Israel so cruelly massacred, and, above all, weep over the unfaithfulness of the rulers of that nation; for already they had denied the Messiah, they had put Him to flight, and they were advancing towards an apostasy graver than the idolatry of their ancient kings, towards chastisement more terrible than invasions from Assyria and Chaldea.

Nevertheless, as always happens, the hate of the tyrant was turned into a work of divine love. Though Jesus, when He appeared, drew down persecution upon those who surrounded Him, He brought them in return for it an eternal reward. The first victims sacrificed for Him, the Innocents, were welcomed by the angels, and descended into Limbus only to await there in peace the glorious crowns of martyrs.

[1] Jeremiah xxxi. 15.

During this time, the holy family were travelling upon the way to exile. The divine command, communicated to Joseph, had met with perfect obedience from that servant of the Lord and from Jesus who passively submitted. Joseph had taken a few indispensable things, and Mary carried her most precious burden; perhaps—we conjecture rather than know it—they had an ass with them to relieve their fatigue somewhat; and the same night that the angel had appeared to them they set out on their way. In four days, perhaps, for they hastened their journey, they could reach Rhinocolura and the "River of Egypt,"[1] the famous frontier of biblical history, beyond which Herod could not pursue them.

According to the accepted local traditions, they went on their journey as far as Heliopolis. This was the ancient town of On, the country of Asenath, the wife of the patriarch Joseph. Its sacred name Pi-Râ, "city of the Sun," became Heliopolis in Hellenised Egypt. Its site is now marked by an obelisk and some ruins level with the ground near the village of Matariyeh about five miles to the north-east of Cairo. In the "balsam garden" at Matariyeh is shown a sycamore, two centuries and a half old, the trunk of which is open and leaning over as if to cast the shadow of its branches. It is called the "tree of the Virgin," and grows in the place of other "trees of the Virgin," more ancient still; and the legend goes, that the holy family rested under the one which nineteen centuries ago grew on the same spot. Some forty yards from the sycamore is a spring which ancient

[1] The Wady el Arish of to-day.

pilgrims used to visit, but its waters are now so choked with infiltrations of the Nile that it is difficult to distinguish it. It is said by the Copts that it was Jesus who caused this spring to gush forth. Also at Old Cairo, a little to the south of Cairo, people visit in the Coptic Church a crypt which may, at a certain period of their journey, have served as a shelter for the exiles.[1]

It was in the neighbourhood of Heliopolis that, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the high priest Onias IV. took refuge. Interpreting according to his own personal views the Law and Isaiah, he built, a few miles to the north of the City of the Sun, a temple, which gave great offence to the people of Jerusalem. After the dispersion, the Jews, scattered throughout Egypt, were especially numerous at Heliopolis and in the region round about. It is then not at all improbable that Mary and Joseph may have travelled a hundred and fifty miles or more, reckoning from Rhinocolura, to settle in a province so much frequented by their compatriots.

The presence there of Jewish communities mitigated, without entirely dispersing, the sadness of the sojourn in a pagan land, and gave to the newcomers greater facilities for finding work. The gold of the wise men, which had been sent to them by Providence on the evening of their departure, had been absorbed by the journey and the expenses necessary in settling in a new home; it is also supposed by many that the holy parents of Jesus

[1] *Cf.* Père Jullien's *L'arbre de la Vierge à Matarieh*, fourth edition, 1904.

did not hoard up their little store of gold, and that they did not hesitate to distribute to the poorest that which they could spare from their own necessities. For their living and for the bringing up of their divine child, they had their daily labour. Joseph laboured at his rough work as a carpenter; and Mary as well, probably sought some gain by the work which she did so cleverly. Sometimes, seated near the cradle of Jesus, she sewed, spun, or embroidered; and sometimes, gliding in modest meditation through the streets of the idolatrous and corrupt town, she went, a humble worker, to seek or take back her work.

The holy family lived there "until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son."[1] The words of Hosea could be literally applied to Israel, but the inspirer, the Holy Ghost, had also spoken them in the mystic sense, of Christ, whose life was typically represented by the history of the chosen people, and only by whose love this people could participate in the title of "son."

"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life." According to the calculation commonly accepted, Herod died in the year 750 of the Roman Empire, and four

[1] Hosea xi. 1.

years before our era, about the time of the Feast of the Passover. Perhaps he was not the only one who was seeking the life of the divine child; and the plural used in the words of the angel permits us to think that God awaited the death, not only of the king, but of one or of several other influential persons. Further, at the time when Joseph returned, the succession to the kingdom seems to have been decided, and that was only done several months after Herod's death. It is therefore possible that the angel did not come immediately after his death to recall the fugitives; but, in view of the expression in the Gospel, one can only surmise that he may have waited a considerable time. On account of the uncertainty which exists as to the precise date of the return and that of the departure, it is difficult to say exactly how long the exile in Egypt lasted. May it not have been three years according to the manner of Hebrew reckoning, that is to say, a complete year, and two fractions of a year? Perhaps this would be a means of explaining the ancient evidences which give a period of three years. But we may also question whether the whole journey may not have lasted at least a year. The only possibility which remains to account for a prolonged sojourn in Egypt, would be an error in the accepted date of the death of Herod; a possibility very slight however, for the date 750, four years before our era, seems on the whole to be soundly established.[1]

[1] For several centuries this date has been accepted by chronologists, who have closely studied the question (see, for example,

Joseph "arose, and took the young child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel." As he had departed from Bethlehem, he proposed to return to it. But on the journey thither "he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod." The reports, gathered in Egypt and on the borders, were correct; Archelaus had for his portion, Judea, with Idumea and Samaria, and already he had shewn some instances of cruelty which indicated that the young prince was walking in the footsteps of Herod. Therefore, the head of the holy family "was afraid to go" into his territory, and asked God in prayer what he should do. "Being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee." Herod Antipas, who was ruler of this province, governed less tyrannically; and, in spite of his vices and crimes, it was in his kingdom that, thirty years later, the preaching of Jesus was received with most tolerance.

For fear of Archelaus, Joseph was obliged to avoid the most direct route, which went through Jerusalem and Samaria, and had to journey by the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, by Gaza, and Cæsarea in Palestine. This route took them past Carmel, and local tradition says that the travellers may have rested in the cave called "The School of the Prophets," one of the most venerated places in

Père Godefroid Henschen in his chronology of the Life of Christ, *Acta Sanctorum*, Propylæum Maii, ed. Palmé, p. 7). It has sometimes been disputed. Twenty years ago, Fl. Riess wrote to prove that Herod died in 753, one year before our era; but he has not been followed.

the holy mountain. Finally they returned to dwell "in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." This somewhat vague expression probably refers to a prophecy which had been orally handed down, rather than to a scriptural text.

## CHAPTER VII

AT NAZARETH—JESUS LOST, AND FOUND IN THE TEMPLE (THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER A.D. 8?)—THE HIDDEN LIFE (UP TO THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 26?)—THE DEATH OF SAINT JOSEPH

IN whose hands and under what conditions the holy family left their house at Nazareth is entirely unknown. However, we here represent them on their return from Egypt, entering into the same dwelling in which the mystery of the Incarnation took place, and in which Jesus lived up till His thirtieth year.

There, under the eyes of Mary, "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him."[1] Mothers find their happiness in watching from day to day the development and progress of their children. Thus Mary found her happiness in seeing Jesus grow, in hearing Him speak His first words, in helping Him to take His first steps. He had truly taken our nature with its weaknesses, and, like other children, He only began to exercise each of the human faculties as the members and organs gradually developed.

From His first hour, however, He possessed a

[1] St Luke ii. 40.

perfect knowledge, not only as God—for in that sense He is essentially wisdom and infinite intelligence—but even as man, and in His created being. God had adorned His intellect with knowledge commensurate with His dignity and His destiny, and consequently incomparably superior to the intuitive knowledge of Mary. Moreover, in virtue of the hypostatic union itself, He possessed a source of knowledge exclusively His own—that of the ever-present divine vision. For alone among men He was at the same time "eternal" and "sojourner"; sojourner because, like us, He lived this mortal life, terrestrial and meritorious, which leads to heaven as to its end; eternal, because, being personally united to God, He already possessed it. His mind saw continually and face to face, the Word in which it subsisted; it saw Him as He is, in the unity of the Father and the Spirit; and, in God, it knew all truth.

Consequently He herein differed from Mary, whose intellect acquired in course of time knowledge really new, which she did not previously possess; while the knowledge possessed by Jesus did not progress by extending itself to new objects. To the perception of His senses, answered, as with us, the play of intellectual faculties; acquired knowledge thus developed itself, following the ordinary laws of human thought; and in that way He knew in a new and experimental fashion, but in reality He learned nothing new. On this account and also by reason of His dignity as chief Master,[1] He could learn nothing from either Mary or Joseph. Nevertheless,

[1] St Thomas, p. 3, q. xii., art. 3.

their attentions and instructions, to which He filially submitted, could be for Him—as well as His progress in years—an occasion of manifesting and expressing by acts and words something of His knowledge and wisdom. And it was marvellous to see Him do with the most supreme facility all that a child of His age could do, allowing nothing to appear which could mar, in the eyes of the world, the utmost perfection possible in a child.

Notwithstanding that His public manifestation by preaching and miracles was to be deferred for some time longer, it was not fitting that He should remain even during the years of His childhood, without bearing witness to His Father and to Himself. In His earliest hours the Father had revealed Him to Elisabeth, to Simeon, to the shepherds, and to the wise men, by the fires of heaven, by the voices of angels, and by the grace of His Holy Spirit. And the Gospel records another incident, in which Jesus, at the age of twelve, began to reveal Himself.

For one instant He showed Himself to the doctors of Israel, and in that glimpse He revealed Himself as the supreme Master and Light of the world.

At the age of twelve, that is, the age at which an Israelite became a "son of the Law," and was initiated by his own act into the practice of the Mosaic religion, it pleased Him to declare the special religious bond which united Him to God; He was His Son, His messenger, and, as man, His servant, wholly devoted to the mission on which He had been sent.

He desired, in fact, to reveal Himself as dependent on His heavenly Father, while showing Himself independent of His earthly parents. This was in no way contradictory to the truth, which He Himself demonstrated on other occasions, of His intimate union with His mother in the accomplishment of the divine work. But on this occasion, He wished to manifest a truth different from that, without being contrary to it, and to give an example of it: for when His mission requires it, Christ and the Messenger of God is, and always must be, independent of all human power and all earthly ties.

With Jesus, the human nature received from Mary must always submit to the divine nature communicated by the Father; even as the natural inclinations of humanity must, in Him, remain subordinate, and sometimes be sacrificed to the divine will, so the maternal influence of Mary and the affection of Jesus for her must be subordinate and sometimes sacrificed to the commands and love of God; and just as, sacrificing all the inclinations of His own flesh, He would one day say, "Father, Thy will, not Mine, be done," so to-day He showed Himself ready to sacrifice the desires and the tenderness of His earthly mother, to the will of His heavenly Father.

The time would come when His disciples, also bearing within them a double life, would in their turn submit, and sacrifice even what was purest in the earthly life, to the life and grace received from heaven. His Gospel would separate the father from the son, and the daughter from the mother; to

guard the faith, or to answer a divine call, it would be necessary to stifle the voice of flesh and blood, to renounce even the most sacred affections, and to live according to the Spirit, to give oneself up to a higher love, and by a hard and rugged road to climb up to God who calls. Jesus, at the same time Master as well as pattern, must Himself set the example of such sacrifices. Not content with giving this example among so many others during His Passion, He desired to give it by itself so that it might be better marked. He, the most loving of sons, would be the first to break the heart of the most loving of mothers, and that at the age when filial affection is most sweet and tender. Could He do it without breaking His own heart? But in what better way could He make us understand that such acts, when God demands them, come from neither hatred nor coldness, but are the sorrowful sacrifice of a deep affection to an affection yet more profound, because it is still more intimate and sacred.

"His parents," relates St Luke, "went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover."[1] Mary was not obliged by the Law to go; but it was a part of her piety and perfection to join in this great solemn feast of Israel, and she loved to revisit as often as possible the place hallowed by the prayers of her childhood, by God's predisposing grace, by the meeting with Simeon, and the offering of Jesus. They perhaps feared to take the divine child with them while Archelaus was governor of

[1] St Luke ii. 41-52; passage commented on in the following pages.

Jerusalem. But when Augustus deposed the young tetrarch and placed Judea under the direct rule of Rome, after the son of Herod had reigned ten years, Jesus was then about twelve years old, and it is possible that He then made His first pascal pilgrimage. However, there is nothing to prove with certainty that He did not, even before that time, accompany Joseph and Mary each year.

In any case, "when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days," whether it was the entire week of the Azyma, or at the least the three days required to satisfy the Law, "as they returned the child Jesus," without telling them, "tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it." For pilgrims from the same country travelled in large companies; they all knew each other, and they could during the long journey join any group of friends at pleasure. Mary and Joseph, not seeing their child near them, supposed that He was in some other part of the long procession of travellers.

They "went a day's journey," as far as Beeroth, about nine miles to the north of Jerusalem.[1] When, in the evening, stopping at their first halting-place, they were surprised at not seeing Jesus return to their side, "they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." As they fruitlessly questioned each group, their uneasiness increased, and soon

[1] To-day called El-Bireh. This is a local tradition borne out by a church and a hospital built in that place at the time of the crusades.

they had searched for Him all through the encampment, but Jesus was not to be found.

What anguish a mother suffers when she has lost her child! And what must have been the anguish of this mother, who was, beyond comparison, of all mothers the most loving! The thought that her Son was God, did not lessen it in the least, for having up to that time seen Him accept all the weaknesses and sufferings of human nature, she could fear for Him the same accidents which befall ordinary children. And had she not before her the constant menace of the sufferings of the Christ, the time and the circumstances of which remained unknown to her? The sword, always near her heart, commenced on this evening to wound it, for though she had already been afflicted with more than one severe trial, she had never since becoming the mother of God experienced such sharp sufferings. It is only her sorrow during the Passion that we can compare with this grief for the loss of Jesus, a loss which was in fact a prelude to the supreme sacrifice.

That was a night of tears and prayers. Mary and Joseph besought the Father, who had confided His Son to them, to bring Him back again to their love, or to manifest His will, and to show them what they must do. When, at the break of day, the caravan resumed its journey towards Samaria and Galilee, they retraced their footsteps. They commenced afresh the search of the evening before, and, doubtless, looked anxiously at each turn of the road, hoping to see their Son running in haste to rejoin

them. But Jesus did not yet return; He was not to be found either in the place where they had lodged in the holy town during the days of the Passover, nor in those parts which they visited before sunset. The night at Jerusalem was as sad as the night at Beeroth, even sadder perhaps, for new hopes had been deceived.

On Sabbath days, and during the time of feasts, the most renowned scribes were accustomed to come to the Temple. They may have occupied a place in one of the outside porticos, or perhaps some room in the buildings which surrounded the interior courts; there they explained the difficulties concerning the Law, willingly allowing questions to be asked, and taking the opportunity of spreading their doctrine. Here it was, that "after three days," that is, the day after their return to Jerusalem, as Mary and Joseph walked through the Temple, the crowd gathered round the doctors of Israel appeared to them more than usually numerous and attentive, and, "sitting in the midst of the doctors," was a child: it was Jesus. The Master here showed Himself, even while taking the part and the attitude of a disciple. He was "both hearing them, and asking them questions." If He questioned the Scribes, "it was not to learn anything from them, but to teach them even while he questioned. . . . He incited them to inquire about those things, which, whether they were acquainted with or were ignorant of them, they had up to that time not been able to understand."[1] Stimulated by His questions, the

[1] Origen, upon this passage (PG. xiii. 1851).

doctors questioned Him in their turn, and He answered them with so much penetration and accuracy, that "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

"And when they saw Him," Mary and Joseph "were amazed." Jesus, so far as we can guess, rapidly brought to an end the discussion that had been begun, and made a sign that His parents awaited Him among the circle of listeners; then with the smile and the simplicity of a child, He went and threw Himself into their arms.

Mary's soul was deeply stirred and troubled. Mingled with the great joy she felt at being united again to her Son, was still the impression of those three days of anguish. Exercising the liberty and authority of a mother, even while always deferential towards the wisdom of her God, she thus complained: "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" In this answer Jesus said exactly that which He desired His future disciples to understand even in a greater degree than His parents: His absolute independence when the service of His true and only Father claimed Him. Mary and Joseph made no mistake as to the perfectly clear meaning of His words. But, at the same time, the answer was somewhat obscure, for Jesus left them in ignorance as to the manner in which the work of God must be accomplished. Would He continue to manifest Himself to the world, or if He returned to the hidden

life, how would that first appearance be connected with that which He would do later, and when and how would He occupy Himself with His "Father's business"? "They understood not the saying which He spake unto them," but prudently and humbly refrained from questioning Him further.

If Jesus is the pattern for children, obliged sometimes to sacrifice the most sacred affections to duty and to a higher love, Mary also is the pattern of those mothers on whom God imposes similar sacrifices. She feels all the bitterness, she even complains, the sorrow has been so keen. But both the sorrow and the complaint are calm and resigned. She humbly bows before Him to whom her child belongs infinitely more than to herself; lovingly acquiescing in the will of God, she accepts the present trial, and the trials and uncertainties of the future; she knows that even the intimacy between mother and son cannot penetrate so deep as that of the Son and the heavenly Father, and she respects the divine rights and secrets that are between them alone.

Jesus "went down with" His parents, "and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Such was the life of the holy family after the return from Egypt, and so it continued up to the thirtieth year of Jesus. There was perfect peace in authority and submission. And one might have observed in this little circle at Nazareth that which

often occurs in all human society and in the Church itself: the order of authority and dependence is not the same as that of perfection and holiness; God ordains that one shall command and that another shall obey, according to the calling and office of each, not according to the degree of merit and virtue; though the superior must at times respect in the inferior a perfection which surpasses his own, and the inferior must always respect in the superior a power derived from the power of God.

Authority and holiness are here found in a precisely inverse ratio to each other. The head of the house is a holy man whose perfection surpasses that of the greatest, yet here he is the least; this he knows and he bears himself in all humility; nevertheless, to his virgin wife, and even to his God, he gives commands without fear or trouble, for he is conscious of doing the will of God and of speaking in His name. Mary conducts herself as becomes a woman, and is modestly submissive to Joseph. She also, while adoring Him whom she commands, gives to Jesus without hesitation the many little orders which a mother gives to her child; calling Him, asking His help, giving Him this or that occupation, or sending Him on some message for her. God had directed Jesus, for three days and for a special purpose, to exempt himself from the paternal authority; but He desired Him to remain for thirty years submissive to that same authority in all the ordinary routine of daily life. In accepting human nature, the Saviour had accepted this humble subjection; and He, holier, wiser, more talented than His parents of Nazareth,

was docile and obedient to their least orders, and attentive to their slightest desires. For such was the will of the Father.

They were not always praying in the holy house, for they gained their living by labour. Poverty is too great a means of sanctification for God not to have imposed it on the three persons in whom He delighted more and more. It was His will that they should sometimes experience it to the point of destitution; in Bethlehem for instance, in the flight into Egypt, and later when Jesus at the time of His preaching, lived, without any certain resources, on the gifts and hospitality of His followers.

The habitual condition of the holy family was not a state of actual want; a state which was very rare among the people of Israel. It seems to have been the honourable position of artisans who are placed beyond want by labour, but who find it necessary to work in order to gain a living.

Joseph therefore went out every morning to his workshop. Jesus, during His first years, remained at home with His mother. Soon He followed his father; He appears to have learned from him His trade of "carpenter," which at that time included that of woodcutter, joiner, and also wheelwright; and under his instruction He made those yokes and ploughs the recollection of which remained a century afterwards.[1] During this time Mary fulfilled all her duties as mistress of a humble household with the most diligent attention. She prepared the meals which Joseph and the child should find ready on re-

[1] St Justin: *contra Tryphonem*, 88 (PG. vi. 688).

turning from their work. Taking upon her shoulder an earthen pitcher she went to draw water from the fountain, the same that one sees there to-day, for there has never been but one fountain at Nazareth. She took care of the linen; and like the thrifty housewives of that time, she also made the greater part of her own clothes and those of her family. She may even have taken or sought for outside work; it would have been a little gain to add to that of Joseph, and a means whereby she could make charitable offerings. Doubtless also, she often gave to the needy, not only the money which she had earned, but the work of her hands as well. Would not her Jesus regard it with the same grateful love, whether she worked for Him or for the poor who are His brethren?

Her life was no less a life of contemplation. In the most secret depths of her soul, and independently of the senses, was that perpetual meditation on the things of God which seems to have been one of her privileges. And moreover, the objects of her thoughts, which a miraculous intervention had from the very beginning implanted in her mind, frequently recurred to her, and she manifested them in all the acts, similar to ours, by which she exercised her faculties. Her eyes were lowered as she walked, her ears were shut to the noise of the world; but her senses, her imagination, her memory, were all concentrated upon Jesus, upon His Person, upon His life, upon all His mysteries, accomplished near her, with her, and in her. This was the treasure

which she guarded in her heart, which she contemplated without ceasing, which she studied under a thousand aspects, which she enriched with new thoughts.

And among these new riches she would doubtless reckon the daily intercourse with Jesus, His confidences given to His mother, His conversation during or after meals, His outpourings, when, on the day of rest He went with Joseph and Mary for a short Sabbath walk, descending with them the hill of Nazareth, or mounting to its summit from whence they could gaze on the Sea of Tiberius encircled with mountains.

It is in fact quite certain, even though no echo of the converse of the holy family has come down to us, that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph daily exchanged their thoughts with each other, their inmost thoughts, upon the business and duties which filled their life, and especially upon the duty of loving God and of uniting themselves with Him, and upon the great subject of the salvation of the world. We like to picture Jesus, prolonging these conversations in proportion as He advanced in years, and Mary and Joseph waiting to hear them with pious eagerness, because they had so often felt their charm. How the words of the Son would be deeply treasured in the mother's heart, and what responses they would there awake! And how Joseph would open his mind to receive the divine confidences! He was destined to die before his adopted Son began His public ministry and he would share neither in the sorrows of His Passion, nor in the triumph of His

glorious life. But it was fitting that at Nazareth he should at least know something of the future reserved for the Son of Man, to whom he had taught his own handicraft, and by whom he was initiated into the mystery of the kingdom of God.

The Gospel, in several passages,[1] shows us Jesus Christ, giving Himself up willingly and with the utmost freedom in His intimate talks as well as in His public preaching. Much more than to Nicodemus, to the Samaritan woman, or to the apostles, He must have manifested Himself to His parents. We see even yet, in the history of the Church, how many saints, both men and women, have been taught and strengthened by private revelations which contain nothing different from public revelations, and which even add nothing of importance to them, but which, nevertheless, give more enlightenment, console more surely, and substitute for a clouded faith, a faith which is luminous, imbued with love and with a beatific intuition. Were not the confidences and outpourings of the hidden life, for Mary, something analogous to this, though sweeter and still higher? These reflections permit us to conjecture how profound and delightful the mystery of this converse must have been. But, as the revelations to the saints remained a secret between God and the favoured soul, so it was with these. It was the secret of Nazareth.

And while Jesus showed more and more the grace and wisdom which were in Him, Mary increased

[1] See St Matthew xiii. 16, 17, and parallel passages; but chiefly the conversations related in St John iii. 1-21; iv. 1-26; ix. 35-38.

day by day in holiness. There were at that time no great and unusual manifestations of grace, as at the Incarnation, at Calvary, or at Pentecost, but a calm mounting upwards—with what a soaring flight however!—and an immeasurable progress in love.

Under the present dispensation of Providence the humanity of our Lord is the great means of developing the divine love in the heart of man. Knowing visibly the God incarnate, we are enraptured by Him to the love of the invisible. Mary entered into the divine scheme. Continually contemplating Jesus, and hearing Him often, she drank deeply of love.

To that love, its incommunicable privileges gave a special and incommunicable character also. It was more than the tender love of a mother, more than the pure and ardent love of a virgin; it united in one heart all the strength and all the delicacy of virginal and maternal love; it was the love of a virgin mother, who, because alone she had given her Son to the world, was so much more exclusively and entirely His.

But, furthermore, it was the love of the mother of God. If Mary shared with no person on earth the rights and the love which motherhood gave her, she would share them with the Father of heaven. In this way, surpassing all the created world, she reached to the very borders of divinity, and in this way her love assumed a character absolutely its own, and in which there is something divine. At the same time that she loved God as her creator, her benefactor, her supreme end, and the sovereign good, she, and she alone, also loved Him as her Son. "My heart

and my flesh crieth out for the living God"[1] saith the Psalmist, and all the faithful with him. But how much more is this true of Mary! All her being is submerged in the love of her Son and her God. The unity of her love as mother and as creature, corresponds to the unity of the Person of the Word made flesh, who is her God and her Son. The object of her affections is unique, and it is towards Him that is directed both the yearning of the mother who loves in her only Son, something of herself, and the most pure love and adoration of the creature casting herself entirely upon her God.

Nevertheless, this love which burns in her at the contemplation of Jesus, has also that characteristic of supreme affection, which is detachment: detachment from all that is perceptible, even in Jesus. For it was sometimes necessary to detach herself even from the sweetness of His presence, and from the joys and consolations which He shed around Him. And Mary, even while hearing and seeing her Son, reminds herself that He is the Holy One of God, that He is given and consecrated to God, and that she herself has offered Him. She sees these things and accepts them. She accepts the fact that her Son must be more to God than to her, that God will require and take Him when it pleases Him, for His service and for His work, for suffering and for death. And her love, purified by the sacrifice, grows still in immeasurable degree.

This love is, in Mary, the principal reason of the merit of her works. For never, at any one time nor

[1] Psalm lxxxiv. 2.

in any one place, in the world was so much merit to be found as in the house at Nazareth. More grace was to be found there than in the most saintly families, the most zealous monasteries, or the most austere solitudes. And yet where could one find simpler and more common occupations, a more humble trade, and more virtuous acts hidden from the eyes of men? But to the commonest actions of exterior life, the interior life, which was the soul of it, gave an inestimable value; the soul was fixed on God, the heart without ceasing was desirous of pleasing Him, it was in short, that incomparable love, that pure gold, which transforms into gold all that comes in contact with it.

The love of Joseph, though less than that of Mary, far surpassed that of other saints, and for him also, during a long course of years, it laid up a treasure of merit. The measure of it desired by God was completed, his work was finished. It was necessary that Jesus, just at the point of manifesting Himself to the world, should reveal Himself as the Son of God and of Mary, and that His adopted father should be effaced so that His true Father, of whom the Saviour would continually speak, might appear. And he, the good servant, who had lived only to do the will of God in all things, and to be the faithful co-worker in the great design, retired simply and humbly, the moment that great design required his disappearance. He was probably then some years over sixty.

He died attended by the cares of Jesus and Mary,

and his death is regarded as the ideal of those who are in all things solaced, sanctified, and blessed. He slept under the kiss of the Lord, and went to Limbus to await the coming victory of Jesus over death. Mary had given him conjugal affection from the depths of her heart, according to the will of God, and her grief was keen and profound. Jesus mourned him also. "Behold how he loved him," said the Jews at the tomb of Lazarus; and Jesus loved Joseph still more.

During the time, which was probably short, that elapsed between the death of the head of the family, and the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus continued to live at Nazareth. "Is not this the carpenter's son?"[1] his fellow countrymen would soon be saying; and they would also say, "Is not this the carpenter?"[2] which perhaps indicates that He worked alone for some time, although the trade followed in conjunction with His adopted father would justify that expression.

The Nazarenes would say, "Is not His mother called Mary?"[3] There is a shade in the turn of that phrase which indicates that the crowd hardly knew her, and that she appeared very little in public. She was in the house as much as possible and was devoted to Jesus. And doubtless, during the days of her widowhood which she passed alone with her Son, the intimacy between them strengthened, and they grew more closely united, as those who have

[1] St Matthew xiii. 55.
[2] St Mark vi. 3.
[3] St Matthew xiii. 55.

loved and suffered together, and are about to be separated. There was between them such a sympathy of heart, such agreement in their views and thoughts, such a mutual love of holiness, and such a desire for the glorifying of God, that nothing can give an idea of the spiritual elevation in which they dwelt—the mother ceasing not to offer her Son to God, while striving to model herself in His likeness, the Son continuing to sanctify His mother, and thanking the Father for having given Him her so perfect.

Perhaps Mary of Cleophas also shared, though in a less degree, in that sacred intimacy. Cleophas had probably died before Joseph. It has even been supposed that the two Maries—Mary of Cleophas and the holy Virgin—may have lived together after their widowhood, but of this there is no actual proof. At least they inhabited the same little town, and there seems to have been a close bond of unity between the holy family and the numerous family—at least three daughters and four sons—of the other Mary. Apparently it was a long and difficult work of grace to transform James, Jude, Joses, and Simon into apostles or zealous disciples of the Saviour. Their mother appears to have been more quickly imbued with faith in the Messiah, and this she owed doubtless, to her familiar intercourse with the mother of Jesus.

# CHAPTER VIII

## JESUS LEAVES NAZARETH—THE MARRIAGE AT CANA—MARY DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JESUS (FROM JANUARY OF THE YEAR 26 TO MARCH OF THE YEAR 29 A.D.?[1])

JESUS had grown up, hidden in the family life, the common and ordinary life of men, so fitting for Him who was to be the model for us all. But in the case of him who had been chosen as the Forerunner of

[1] According to the chronological reckoning adopted here, John the Baptist began to preach towards the end of the year 25; Jesus was baptised in the Jordan in January of the year 26; the passion and the resurrection took place during the Feast of the Passover in the year 29. This chronological reckoning is considered probable by a great number of writers. Others, it is true, adopt a different hypothesis. However, for the date of the passion, the uncertainty lies between the two years 29 and 30 only. The year 30 has its advocates, and the recent works of M. Jean van Bebber have further increased the number of those who think that our Lord suffered on Friday the 7th of April, and rose again on Sunday the 9th of April in the year 30. But for weighty reasons, both traditional and scientific, the balance seems to be in favour of the year 29, which has for a long time had the support of numerous scholars (see, for example, the *Propylæum* for May of the Bollandists). I consider then, that so far as our present information goes, it is most probable that our Lord suffered in March of the year 29, on a Friday close to the equinox (I cannot venture to determine more exactly the day of the month), and I calculate from this hypothesis the commencement of His public life.

Christ, the guidance of Providence took a more unusual and extraordinary course. John the Baptist had dwelt in the desert of Judea from his earliest infancy up to the time of his manifestation to the people of Israel.

In that solitude the word of God came to him, he received a mission to preach to the world repentance and preparation of the heart for the coming of the Messiah. Travelling through the region of the Jordan, he drew crowds together, preached to them, aud administered a baptism of repentance to prepare them for the remission of their sins. It was the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, reckoning from his association in the government of the empire rather than from the death of Augustus.[1] Judea, properly so called, had had no other native princes since the expulsion of Archelaus, and it was then governed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Herod Antipas, who, at the death of Herod the Great, had received Galilee as his share, governed it with the title of tetrarch. Philip, one of his brothers, had the tetrarchy of Ituræa and Trachonitis; and Lysanias, a stranger to the family of the Herods, was tetrarch of Abilene. In the religious world the supreme pontificate was held by Joseph Caiaphas; his father-in-law Hanan, Annas, as he is usually called, in virtue of his past pontificate and because of his persistent influence, also retained the title of High Priest. Such was the state of things when the Baptist preached, and when his words created such a profound emotion among the people of Israel.

[1] *Cf.* St Luke iii. 1-4.

The "voice of one crying" resounded, as it is written in Isaiah, commanding them to prepare the way of the Lord. The Lord Himself was soon to appear, to deliver and bring back again His people. Accordingly, shortly after the appearance of John the Baptist, Jesus warned His mother that the period of family life and of the sweet intimacy of Nazareth was now past; that the hour, so long foreseen, had now come, when the service of the Father claimed Him entirely. Mary could only submit to the divine will, though at the same time it crushed her dearest affections. She and Jesus again made that absolute sacrifice of themselves which they had long since offered. Doubtlessly they embraced each other; it is even quite possible that Jesus, kneeling down, begged of Mary, in virtue of her maternal authority, to bless Him before He went. And Mary gazed long at Him who was about to leave her.

Jesus first of all sought out the Baptist. For it was meet that He should give authority to his mission by publicly recognising that he was sanctified and sent from God. It was in the stream of the Jordan at Bethabara, just opposite Jericho, and quite probably on the 6th of January in the year 26, that He received baptism from John, and the witness of the Father.

Immediately, the Holy Spirit, which rested upon Him, led Him into the wilderness. Upon the barren mountains situated to the west of Jericho, Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and was three times in succession tempted of the devil. Then,

full of grace and truth, the true Light which came to illuminate the world, He descended again towards the valley, where, since the manifestation of God of which he had been witness, the Baptist had without ceasing preached of Him and testified to Him.

To his most intimate disciples John did more than speak: he showed them "the Lamb of God."[1] The first who understood and realised his meaning were Andrew of Bethsaida, and a young man of pure heart and ardent soul, who became more intimate than any of the others with Jesus and His mother, John, the son of Zebedee the fisherman. John probably brought to the Master his brother James, with whom the Gospel always associates him; Andrew brought his brother Simon, to whom Jesus on beholding him said; "Thou shalt be called Cephas," that is to say, Peter. Then Jesus, returning towards Galilee, met Philip, who was of Bethsaida also, and saith unto him, "Follow me." Philip, in his turn, brought the son of Talmai, Nathanael of Cana, who is generally called Bartholomew. Though not as yet definitely vowing themselves to His service, these five or six first disciples began to gather round the Master and follow Him whithersoever He went. They were His attendants, when, in the second half of February, Jesus returned to Galilee.

"And the third day," after one of the meetings related above, "there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there."[2] The

[1] With this paragraph *cf.* St John i. 29-51.

[2] St John ii. 1-2; passage commented upon in the following pages.

betrothed couple, or one of them, were in all likelihood, relatives or friends of the holy family. Mary, who in her love towards God, shewed an active love in the service of her neighbours, had come to help them, as she had formerly gone to Kârem to console and help Elisabeth. Because of the friendship between the two families, and in gratitude for Mary's help, Jesus also was invited to this marriage; and since He had returned to His country accompanied by disciples, His disciples were likewise invited.

Though the holiness of Jesus was incomparably greater than that of John the Baptist, it nevertheless possessed an appearance less austere and more attractive to the multitude. The Saviour and His most pure mother did not refuse to take part in the seemly festivities of a marriage. They assisted in the joyous and gay procession, which, at night-fall, conducted the bride from her house to that of the bridegroom. Then, while Mary looked to the ordering and serving of the feast, Jesus took His seat at the table with the other guests.

As furniture and servants were so easily borrowed, marriage festivities, even among humble people, were never without a certain amount of appearance. This feast, however, was given by a poor family which was obliged to exercise some restraint in the expenses and preparations. The presence of the disciples brought by Jesus, which had not been taken into consideration at first, probably helped to account for the provision of wine being soon exhausted. Mary, ever watchful and attentive, perceived that humiliation threatened the hosts; and with delicacy

she hastened to prevent it, for she knew to whom to turn for assistance.

As she was not sitting at table, but was occupied in serving, it was quite easy for her to approach Jesus, and to whisper in His ear, "They have no wine." Jesus answered her, "Woman"—this form of address, very common in the New Testament, seems to have had, in the mouth of a master or a prophet speaking to his mother, a degree of respect comparable to the *Madame* of courtly politeness—"Woman, what have I to do with thee?[1] Mine hour is not yet come."[2] Though these words were said with affectionate gentleness, they were, none the less, a refusal to intervene, a refusal suggested by the dispensation of Providence, for the time for a miraculous manifestation had not yet arrived.

But Mary knew and felt in herself a strength to which even the divine decrees might yield; or, to be more precise, she knew that the divine decrees are often conditional, and are accomplished or not, according to the all-powerful force of prayer. Before long, Jesus would declare that the will of the Father

[1] One may see, both in Hebrew and Greek, examples of the same expression extremely diverse in context and shade of meaning, which correspond to the words, "What have I to do with thee?": Judges xi. 12; 2 Samuel xvi. 10; 1 Kings xvii. 18; 2 Chronicles xxxv. 21; St Mark v. 7, etc.

[2] Tatian, to judge from the Arabic version of his *Diatessaron*, and St Gregory of Nyssa (*in hunc locum*; PG. xliv. 1308) have read, with a note of interrogation, "Is mine hour not already come?" But a vast majority of the evidences for the text do not recognise this interrogative form, which gives, in my opinion, a meaning which is not so good as the ordinary reading.

would not permit Him to work a miracle on behalf of a woman who was a stranger in the house of Israel; and, a few minutes after, moved by the tears and prayers of that stranger, He would grant that which He had at first refused. The persistence of Mary is of the same kind as that of the woman of Canaan whom Jesus praised for her great faith. But, as Mary's faith was incomparably deeper and more certain, so was her prayer more powerful, and likewise more pleasing and serene in its triumph. At the very time when Jesus appears to set aside her request, she turns to the servants who follow her, and leaving them near Him, she says, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!"

"And there were set," doubtless before the door of the room or tent in which the feast was held, six of those enormous "water-pots of stone," which were kept to contain water for "the purifying," and the numerous ablutions "of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece," which is at the least nine gallons each, or, according to others, a great deal more. "Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And," at once, obedient to the instructions of Mary, they ran to fetch the water, adding it to that which the pots already contained, till "they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast." They therefore dipped a cup into one of the water-pots, and carried it to the distinguished guest who had been chosen governor of the feast. And "when the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it

was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom"; and doubtless showing it to the guests, and speaking loudly so that the compliment, expressed in so pleasant a manner, should be heard by all, he "saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The servants, while filling the cups, explained the enigma. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him."

Thus, in the midst of what was apparently a worldly feast, and by means of earthly help given to humble people in a difficulty, Providence had guided everything to a spiritual end, so as to manifest the glory of Jesus, to call the guests to faith in the new Master, and more than all to establish that faith in the souls of those disciples whom Jesus was about to make His first apostles. It was through this guidance of Providence that Mary had had a special place assigned to her in that episode; for this first call to faith in the Messiah, is one of those initial works in which it pleases God to manifest the guidance which He exercises in all similar matters.

That supreme initial work, the Incarnation, had been commenced with the consent of Mary and was carried out with her co-operation; the initial work of the bestowal of the first grace upon John, had been by the words of Mary; in the manifestation

of Jesus through the heavenly signs which accompanied His birth, the Virgin mother presented to Him those whom these signs had brought to the Holy Child; the first manifestation in the public life of Jesus was yet another initial work, the miracle by which He implanted faith in the souls of His disciples. Thus the title of generator of the faith, in all truth, belongs to Mary. And God in thus connecting His mother with all these occasions of the beginning of grace, intends to shew that the spiritual work depends entirely upon her, and that that work bears its best fruit in the soul when Mary is there to facilitate its fulfilment.

"After this He went down" from Cana towards the Sea of Galilee, and came "to Capernaum, He and His mother, and" the four sons of Cleophas whom they called "His brethren, and His disciples."[1] The time of His public manifestation had come, and it was intentionally that Jesus chose for His place of sojourn one of the most populous and busy towns of Galilee. His first disciples followed Him there, drawn by the sweet charm which had at first attracted them to Him, and more strongly attached to His person by the miracle which they had witnessed. As for the "brethren of the Lord," they neither then nor even at a much later time believed on Him,[2] but curiosity, aroused by what had happened at Cana, had caused them to follow His steps. Whether Mary had already given up her house at Nazareth, or whether she was for a few days only

[1] St John ii. 12. [2] St John vii. 5.

among those who followed her Son, it is scarcely possible to say.

In any case, Jesus and those who were with Him remained at Capernaum "not many days"[1] on that occasion. The Feast of the Passover drew nigh, and the Master went up to Jerusalem. There He cleansed the Temple from the buyers and sellers who defiled it, and clearly vindicated the honour of His Father's house; by His preaching and miracles He gained disciples, and He moved the hearts even of those who did not immediately follow Him, as, for example, Nicodemus the pharisee, one of the Sanhedrim. Long after the paschal feast was over, Jesus still remained in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Throughout all Judea proper, He won souls, and His disciples baptised those who resolved to come to Him. Not only weeks, but months had passed, and when, after having crossed Samaria, where He revealed Himself to those at Jacob's Well and at Sichem, Jesus at length entered into Galilee, it was December of the year 26. Then was commenced in this region, that preaching of the kingdom of God, the narrative of which has been especially preserved in the first three Gospels.

It was the gracious desire of Jesus to offer to the town of "Nazareth, where He had been brought up,"[2] the blessing of one of His first preachings.

[1] St John ii. 12. Concerning the first period of the public life of the Saviour, see St John ii., iii., iv.

[2] St Luke iv. 16. See verses 16-30, in which the incident is related.

He therefore came there one Sabbath day, attended the meeting in the synagogue, and as was His usual custom, read and explained the Scriptures. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the Prophet Isaiah; and the passage upon which He chanced to open, or rather the passage chosen by His wisdom from the beginning to be read on that occasion, was this: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Jesus closed the book, gave it back again to the minister, and sat down. All eyes were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

It would be pleasant to dwell upon this sweet revelation of Jesus, and upon the first impression which He made upon the Nazarenes, who "all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." But unhappily, other reflections soon came to their minds. The disparity between the hitherto humble life of the "son of Joseph," and the wonderful wisdom of the young Master, instead of clearly demonstrating to them the intervention of God, caused among them an astonishment bordering upon offence. They thought they had the right to demand from their fellow-countryman, as a proof of His mission, some of those miracles of which their lack of spiritual feeling rendered them unworthy. But Jesus quickly

recalled to their memories how often a prophet is coldly received by his own people, who, looking at him from a human point of view, discuss his person and status instead of paying deference to the messenger of God. Thus, Elijah and Elisha, ill-treated by the people of Israel, found hospitality among strangers, and discovered among them hearts that were better prepared to receive the divine influence. These warnings of the wise and loving Master, instead of causing the Nazarenes to reflect, exasperated them the more. They rose up tumultuously, and thrusting Jesus out of the synagogue and out of the town, they led Him unto the brow of the hill upon which Nazareth is built, that they might cast Him down headlong.

Pilgrims to Galilee are told that Mary was present at that scene; tradition represents her, wounded in her mother love, and in her affection for her dear Nazareth, mournfully following her Son, whom they brought to the brink of the precipice.[1] But it was God's will that yet for two years and more, Jesus should offer grace to the hardness of heart of His own people. At His will He defeated the design of His enemies, and quietly "passing through the midst of them went His way."

At the time of the Passion, Mary was confided to the care of Saint John at Jerusalem, and there is no longer any question of her living at Nazareth. It

[1] As to the local identification of the spot, it is commonly admitted that it is necessary to correct the tradition of Nazareth, which points out a rock much too far from the town.

seems then, that at a certain time, difficult to determine, she left the house where they had passed so many peaceful years together, for the purpose of being nearer her Son. It is supposed by many authorities that she lived at Capernaum, where she had already passed some days after the marriage at Cana, and where the Saviour often returned. It is also believed that she accompanied Him, at least at intervals, in His missions, attentively hearing His word, and rejoicing in God and in His miracles.

She had without doubt her place of honour among the group of women who followed Jesus and served Him. "And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others."[1] And to these, who are mentioned by St Luke, St Matthew and St Mark add, "the mother of Zebedee's children," who was probably called Salome, and "Mary, the mother of James the less and of Joses,"[2] that is, Mary of Cleophas. This latter appears to have been so attached to her "sister," that her mere presence among the holy women is an indication of the presence of Mary herself. All the others were strongly attached to the mother of Jesus by a dutiful and holy bond. Mary taught them how to serve Jesus; her converse and even her companionship, purified the souls of those who

[1] St Luke viii. 2, 3.

[2] St Matthew xxvii. 56; St Mark xv. 40. It seems that Salome (St Mark) and the mother of James and Joses (St Matthew) are the same person.

formerly were sinners; she elevated and encouraged the pure among them, and taught them all, holiness of life and the fervency of divine love.

During the whole period of the public life of Christ, the Gospel makes only a passing reference to Mary, and even then indirectly, in two incidents which it is quite useless to try to place chronologically, for they have very little connection with the chain of Gospel history. On these two occasions, Jesus gives us some significant and useful instruction concerning His mother; and, for those who know how to meditate upon and weigh the meaning of His words, He praised her in the most delicate manner, and taught us to comprehend her greatness more truly.

One day, while He was speaking to the people in the house in which He stayed at Capernaum, the sons of Mary of Cleophas came with the Holy Virgin, seeking Him, and requesting to be allowed to speak to Him.[1] They came near the circle of listeners, and the report spread from one to another that the mother of Jesus was there, with others of His relatives, and that she desired to speak to her Son. "Behold," said some one, "Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee." But Jesus was engaged in carrying out the divine work, and He wished to teach them, that in the service of God, one must be free from all, even the closest, earthly bonds, and He desired to set before them an example as well as the precept. With the

[1] St Matthew xii. 46-50; St Mark iii. 31-35; St Luke viii. 19-21.

promptness and seasonableness of His divine eloquence, He said: "Who is My mother? And who are My brethren?" Then, looking at the crowd grouped round Him, and perceiving among them those who already followed Him devotedly, those who desired to be His own, He stretched forth His hand towards them and said: "Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." In His attitude and His words, Jesus shews us—as before, when He was twelve years old, in the Temple—the man of God, entirely absorbed in the interests of His Father, independent of the ties of flesh and blood. And He gave to His disciples, and beyond them, to His future apostolic workers, the lesson that they also must live only for the souls of men and for God. This it is which is their family, of which Jesus is the centre and the bond; both the bond between the members, and the bond between the members and the Father.

To this lesson of detachment the Master added yet another teaching, which was an encouragement to the faithful among His listeners, and which remains a precious consolation for us. Whosoever receives the word of God and does His will, enters in spirit into a covenant with our Lord, an alliance which is as close as that of a near relationship. He is His brother—Jesus repeats it, and throughout the New Testament there is assurance of it—and in other respects, he is His mother also; Christ is spiritually born in his heart, and, if he be an apostle, through him in the hearts of others also; and he

shares in the affection with which Jesus surrounds His beloved mother.

But, in every way and before and above all others, that affection and union with Jesus belongs to Mary; for, more than any one else, she has in all her conduct conformed to the divine will. Did she not conceive the Word, in recognising herself as the servant of the Lord, and in giving up herself entirely to His will? And does not the word of Jesus say that she is still more dear to Him, and in a sense, more His mother, by that spiritual consanguinity which unites her to the Father and to Him, than by the mere natural filiation through which He inherited from her His flesh and blood?

On another occasion when Jesus was preaching, a woman in the crowd lifted up her voice and cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked."[1] And the Saviour answered: "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." On this occasion Jesus turned the conversation into a different channel. He did not wish to be heard praising His mother in public, and He did not desire that His listeners should praise her to Him, as this woman had intended to do. His thoughts always turned to the good of those who heard Him, and to the welfare of their souls. Therefore, seizing, as He sometimes loved to do, the principal word of the phrase, He passed it on to the crowd gathered round to listen to His teaching: "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it!"

[1] St Luke xi. 27, 28.

We find here the same doctrine set forth as in the preceding incident. We must be bound to Jesus by our hearts, we must listen to the word of God, and put it into practice by doing His will. In explaining the comparison (emphasised by the word "rather[1]") between the divine motherhood considered apart from grace, and the grace itself which is a privilege of those who keep the word of God, theologians have to take into account all the aspects of a very complex question. To put the matter briefly, the sanctifying grace surpasses in many respects, and especially in respect of blessedness which is the point in question, the divine motherhood considered apart from this same grace; above all it surpasses the motherhood such as it was conceived by this woman, who, probably without having any clear idea of the divinity of Jesus, shewed for His mother an admiration purely human and earthly. Moreover the object of the Saviour in this saying was thoroughly practical; He desired to incite His hearers to receive the good words and to live in a manner conformable to their faith.

But even in this, He yet again indirectly praises Mary, in whom dignity as the mother of God, and plenitude of grace are inseparable; He recognises the happiness she has had in bringing Him into the world, and to this He adds the happiness of having, more fully than any other mortal, received and kept

[1] This recognition of the comparative meaning cannot however be said to be unanimous. Euthymius Zigabenus, for example, renders the word in St Luke, not by "rather" but by "truly, indeed." "Μενοῦνγε, τουτέστιν, ἀληθῶς" (PG. cxxix. 973).

the word of God. And this is why the Church, on several of the feasts of Mary and in her votive mass, reads this particular passage of the Gospel. With the unknown woman, the Church lifts its voice to celebrate her who has borne and nurtured Jesus; with Jesus Himself, it warns us not to stop there, but to see also in Mary her who keeps in her heart the Word, the eternal object of her love; and finally, still with Jesus, it exhorts us, while exalting the mother of God, to reproduce in our lives that which we may imitate in hers, fidelity to the word of the Lord.

The same teaching is found in yet a third story from the Gospel, in which Mary is not directly concerned, but which the liturgy applies to her by a symbolism which it is easy to understand.[1]

In the course of one of His last journeys, Jesus came to the gates of Jerusalem, at Bethany, where lived the family whom He loved, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Martha, who was the mistress, received Him into the house; her sister Mary seated herself at the feet of Jesus, and there listened to His words. During this time "Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

[1] St Luke x., 38-42. Gospel for the Feast of the Assumption.

The Virgin, the mother of Jesus, is in all things the example and the ideal. A woman above all, she unites in herself, without any alloy of imperfection, all that which the Gospel praises in Martha and Mary. She has received in her abode the Word as a visitor. She has fed Him, she has served Him with her hands, and her care for Him has neither troubled the peace of her soul nor interrupted her meditations; she has heard all that Jesus has said to her; modestly hidden among the crowd gathered at His feet, she has listened to all that He has said to the world; and while never ceasing to work for Him, she has meditated on all His teachings in her heart. Truly blessed, as Elisabeth had said of her; truly blessed, as Jesus said of those who keep His word; truly blessed, as the Church loves to repeat in speaking of her! And when it honours her in her supreme beatitude, the Church sees her still refreshing herself from the Word of God, no longer by faith, but in the clear vision, and it applies to her the words of Jesus, "Verily, Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall never be taken away from her."[1]

[1] Mass of the Assumption, antiphon at the Communion.

## CHAPTER IX

THE PASSION OF JESUS; MARY'S COMPASSION AND MERIT; HER SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD—THE LAST SUPPER, GOOD FRIDAY, THE CROSS—THE BURIAL OF JESUS AND THE SOLITUDE OF OUR LADY (MARCH OF THE YEAR 29 ?[1])

AS a perfect hearer of the word of God, Mary was in that respect, as in so many others, a type of the Christian Church.

As for the Jewish community, alas! they alienated themselves more and more from that word, to their complete reprobation. When Jesus, at each solemn feast, returned to teach at Jerusalem and in the Temple, the attacks of the Scribes and the Pharisees became at every visit more acute and vehement. During His last journey, at the time of the Feast of the Dedication in December of the year 28, and before the definite assertion of His divinity, some of the people had taken up stones and threatened to stone Him; but even while departing from the town, Jesus did not cease His endeavours to win them to Him by His grace and goodness. In February or in the early part of March of the year 29, He went to visit Bethany,

[1] As to the probability of this date, see the note at the beginning of chapter viii.

and by the striking miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, He for the last time drew upon Himself the attention of well-disposed men, and of His irreconcilable enemies also. This supreme mercy, while it was the means of bringing about several important conversions, at the same time caused the Sanhedrim to determine the death of Jesus. From thenceforth, the achievement of their purpose was only a question of time and opportunity.

Unknown to the great Council, and even against its will, this time was regulated by the divine wisdom. Jesus withdrew for some days to the little town of Ephraim, of the ancient tribe of Benjamin; then, as the time of that Passover drew nigh when the true victim should be sacrificed, He reappeared and came to finish His work.

Six days before the feast, He returned to Bethany. One of His disciples, Simon the Leper, gave a feast in His honour, at which Lazarus was present. Martha was this time also occupied with serving; and Mary, her sister, anointed the head of Jesus with precious spikenard ointment, and Jesus accepted this homage in token of His approaching burial. The faithful were grouped round the Master, and the Master by His acts and words presaged His approaching transition from the world to His Father.

It is very probable that Mary also was there, possibly among the band of Galileans who followed and attended upon Jesus, or more probably, like Jesus, she was hospitably welcomed to the house of Lazarus and his sisters.

On the day following the feast at Simon's house,

she saw the crowd suddenly stirred at the news that Jesus was there, and that He was about to enter he town. People of Jerusalem, pilgrims to the Feast of the Passover, the special group of those who had been moved by the resurrection of Lazarus, all these cut palm-leaves and olive branches, and threw them with their garments before the Master, crying, "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus accepted, He even called forth worship from these faithful hearts; but He wept over Jerusalem at the thought of the irremediable offence, which in a few days she would commit. Mary, intimately acquainted with the inclination of His heart, rejoiced to see the Messiah recognised and solemnly received in the capital of the kingdom of Israel; but the brightness of the present day gave her no illusions as to the real disposition of the people, and the sudden changes which she foresaw were in store for the morrow.

Even if she had not always clearly known when and how the "Father's work" would be accomplished, now that matters had progressed so far, she could not but see that the end must be very near. The fleeting enthusiasm of the crowd could not prevail against the persistent ill-will of the leaders. Because of this triumphal entry, Jesus was more than ever discussed and opposed; that very evening, the Messiah, now so clamorously applauded, would be alone; and, later, accompanied only by some of His disciples, He departed from the town, to seek repose and security at Bethany.

It is even possible that Jesus announced clearly to Mary that which she already foresaw. Who knows what intimate converse passed between them in the house of Martha and Lazarus, either during that Wednesday when Jesus did not return to Jerusalem, or on the Thursday before the departure for the Feast of the Passover? In proportion to Mary's tenderness of heart, she felt a terror of the coming evil. It was the will of Jesus that even His own human nature should feel this terror, and that it should ask, if it were possible, to be spared the bitter cup. How then should Mary not experience this same horror, the same trembling in all her being, the same apprehensive feeling, the same repugnance of her will, before this approaching and inevitable suffering? So could she also, without imperfection, suffer her nature to give some cry of anguish, or some conditional prayer, even like that of Jesus, in order that, if it were possible, the terrible hour might be averted or delayed.

Herein is one of the aspects of truth, and it is an aspect which the poetry of christian ages has often rendered in a most touching manner, when it has attempted to picture this last meeting between the mother and her Son. But it is also an aspect which it is necessary to take care not to consider by itself—and in poetry this has not always been done —if we would not lessen the importance of Mary's personality. In her, at the moment when Jesus is confronted by His Passion, there is much more than a loving and fearful mother; she is then, more than ever, the intimate associate of the Redeemer. If

Jesus, some days or some hours beforehand, desired by a last conversation to prepare her for that great trial—and this is an hypothesis which heart and mind may easily consider probable—He must have talked with her in a manner more lofty than we can imagine, of the great sacrifice of the Passion, of the redemption of the world, and of the spiritual life of the soul. Afterwards—and this is not an hypothesis, but a definite statement of Gospel history—Mary followed Jesus in the path of His sorrows, and accompanied Him to Calvary. And, in the opinion of theologians and saints, it was in all fitness, if not indeed a necessity, that at the hour of the supreme sacrifice she should thus be near her Son; both the great divine scheme and the harmony of God's purpose regarding her required it to be so. At the same time that the bloody Passion completed and perfected Jesus as our Saviour,[1] Mary, the queen of saints and our mother, was also completed and perfected in passing through that anguish.

This was the perfecting of her holiness; for those whom God desires to make holy, He "conformed to the image of His Son,[2] either by sending them trials of the flesh and spirit like those of Jesus, or by uniting them to Him in the contemplation, full of love and compassion, of His sufferings. It is remarkable that the best loved of the apostles, and the only one who followed Jesus to the cross, was also the only one who did not suffer a violent death. May it not be, that in his case the part he took in the Passion of Jesus, which was accomplished

[1] Hebrews ii. 10. [2] Romans viii. 29.

before his eyes, bringing him, so to speak, into direct communion with the sufferings of the Master, served as a kind of exalted martyrdom in place of the martyrdom of blood and of the sword? And does not this help us to understand something of Mary's compassion? "It is therefore greater to suffer with Christ than to suffer for Him; there is in this a closer union with Christ, a more efficacious influence of the Passion of Christ, a deeper anguish, when one endures, not His own sufferings, but rather those of Christ."[1] It was by this martyrdom of the heart that the holiness of the queen of martyrs had to be perfected.

Therefore, that day of sadness was for her a day of inestimable merit. Taken by itself, suffering is neither the only nor the principal source of merit. But when it is joined to love, which gives to it its real value, there is not, upon earth, and in the present order of things, a better means of acquiring merit. This providential law is clearly indicated even by the mystery of the cross. Strictly speaking, it was at the time of the Passion that the merits of Jesus were accepted on our account; for it was at that moment that it pleased God to accept the infinite merits of His whole life, united to the infinite merit of His sufferings and death. Mary, who was always closely connected with her Son, suffered with Him; we can have no idea of the anguish she then endured, for the perfection of her nature and the spiritual gifts she had received,

[1] Guillaume le Petit (abbot of Bec?), *On the Canticles*, iii. 10 (quoted from Terrien, *La mère des hommes*, t. iii. p. 227-8).

augmented in her the power of suffering to its utmost limit; her sorrowing love was of an heroic character, a form of love particularly meritorious and most appropriate to our earthly life; by it she connects her acts with the acts of the infinitely pure love of Christ, at that time when He loved, even unto death, God His Father and all creation in Him.

At the same time that she acquired for herself these gifts of grace, Mary also obtained merit for all those whom God has called to a spiritual life. Without doubt, these merits obtained for us were of a different kind to those of her Son. He is the only mediator, and the mediator for Mary, as well as for the rest of mankind, because His mediation only is strictly necessary and sufficient for giving us access to God. To Him alone belongs the merit of "excellence," of "strict and rigorous justice," of "full condignity"; for He alone, by the especial efficacy of His acts, bestows the just reward of heavenly blessings and of eternal life, and offers to heaven a reparation fully commensurate with the majesty of the offended God. The merit that one pure human being gains for another is only a merit "of congruity";[1] and moreover, it is only through the power of the merits of Jesus Christ that a human being possesses this merit. But, this reservation being made, God desires that His faithful, while entirely dependent upon His Son, should also obtain merit for one another. It is one of the

[1] Christ alone is worthy to obtain grace for others *de condigno*; Mary and other righteous souls merit grace for themselves *de condigno*, but for others *de congruo*.

features of the Communion of Saints, that within the body of Christ's Church the members should reflect from one to the other something of the life which they all receive from their Head. And the merits of Mary possess a value above those of other saints, for they proceed from one who is entirely pleasing in God's sight; they are far-reaching, for they proceed from a member, who, next to the Head and under His influence, exercises a universal influence upon the mystic body and upon the graces which nourish it. These merits Our Lady accumulated for us during the whole of her life, like a good mother who lays up treasure for her children, but she especially increased the sum of it by her sufferings with the Saviour at the foot of the cross.

And by this she has earned for herself the beautiful title of mother of the human race, and so many other glorious names by which we honour our queen, our co-redeemer, and our mediatrix near the Mediator. These prerogatives are not merely the brilliant sequel to her divine motherhood; they are also the rewards due to her own personal deeds and sorrows, offered and accepted for us. "By the communion of suffering and of will between Christ and Mary, she *merited and was rendered entirely worthy of becoming the restorer of the lost world*, and in consequence, the dispenser of all the benefits which Jesus has bought for us by His blood and death." [1]

[1] Pius X., Encyclical *Ad diem illum*, 2 February 1904. The portion in italics is a quotation from Eadmer: *de excellentia B. Mariæ*, cap. ix. (PL. cliv. 228; inter opera B. Anselmi).

She was worthy of all these titles, and became more entirely all that which these titles express. For, if on that day she was near Jesus, it was that she might be consummated and perfected for the work which Providence had given her to do. It has pleased God that the whole salvation of the world should depend on three wills; that of the Father, that is, the single divine will of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that of the Word made flesh, or the human will of Jesus; and, finally, that of Mary, whose consent was in truth, required, and on whose consent the destiny of the world truly depended. This consent, given by her, is the fundamental reason of her dignity as co-redeemer; it has bound her will by an indissoluble tie to that of her Son, and even to that of God, in all that which concerns the salvation and the spiritual life of the world. For, in accepting the Messianic work, of which the angel sketched the grand outline, and in commencing it then by freely accepting motherhood, it was most truly the Incarnation and the whole Redemption to which she consented, and in which she participated. And in truth, in the divine sight, the work of Christ is all one. Jesus became incarnate only that He might die for us, and by so doing, give eternal life to every creature; from the first moment He devoted Himself for this supreme sacrifice, towards which His whole existence was directed.

Therefore, since all that was to be accomplished at Calvary was the development and the end of that which had commenced in the little room at Nazareth,

how could Mary, present and taking part in the beginning, have been absent at the last hour? Is it not natural that at the moment when the Redemption is consummated, there should again be found the same three persons and the same three wills that took part in the commencement? The Father is there, He who gave to us His Son, He to whom is offered the sacrifice, and who accepts it for us. Jesus is there, priest and victim, accomplishing to the end that reconciliation for which He had come into the world. Mary must also be there, repeating the *fiat* of the Incarnation, in accepting the last and most sorrowful consequences, and in sacrificing her maternal love to our salvation; she, who has borne Jesus, who has presented Him in the Temple, and who has brought Him up in view of this last hour, must, at this hour also, renew and fulfil the offering which she has made to God; she must, in fact, at this moment when, more than ever, Jesus is given to us, fulfil her mission, which is, in conjunction with the Father, to give us Jesus.

To give us Jesus, to co-operate in the Redemption, and to become our mother, is to Mary one and the same thing. Thus, at the time when she completes and perfects her co-operation, she also completes and perfects her motherhood in relation to us. At the hour of the Incarnation she conceived Jesus and us with Him, receiving already in the womb of her charity, those who will one day be incorporated with Jesus and live in His life. But there is a wide difference between the birth of Jesus and our spiritual birth. He but lately came into the world in joy and

gladness, amid the splendours of the first Christmas night. But our birth was delayed until the Passion and Calvary; for it was only then that God accepted, with the death of His Son, all the redeeming acts of His life; it was only then that He pardoned the guilty for the sake of the Righteous One who was substituted for them; it was only then that, because of this substitution, because Jesus had borne and expiated our sins, that we became partakers in His rights and in His divine Sonship; and finally, it was then that we commenced to live our spiritual life. It was therefore fitting that Mary should be there to finish that which she had aforetime begun, and to bring to birth the members of her Son. She must be there to ratify that which she has already done, bringing us forth as she had conceived us, by her will and her love, and offering to God, at the same moment that the offering is accepted, the Victim who reconciles us and gives us life. A birth, the remembrance of which increases the children's love for the mother, and the mother's love for the children of her sorrow.

Just before entering on the path of His suffering, Jesus had a great desire to partake, with His disciples, a last paschal supper. With them He ate the symbolical lamb; then completing the fulfilment of the Law by replacing the symbol by the reality, He gave them the Lamb of the true Passover, His body sacrificed and His blood shed; thus instituting that memorial of His Passion, which to the end of time will remain the centre of christian worship.

The primitive group for the sacrificing and eating of the lamb, was the family. It could, it is true, be enlarged by invitations or additions of neighbours and friends, or be modified by various circumstances; but it appears that, in any case, there was nothing to prevent the women from mingling with the men. It is probable that, at the Gospel period, the women did not, like the men, recline on couches, but they ate with them in the same room, and formed part of the same company.[1] It is therefore quite likely that in the guest-chamber on Mount Zion, which was borrowed by Jesus from one of His disciples and which remained the sanctuary of the first christians, Mary took part in the Paschal Feast with the Saviour, the apostles, and other holy women, perhaps Mary of Cleophas, or Salome, the mother of James and John.

She was then, probably there, following each movement of Jesus, attentive to all His words; understanding far better than the apostles the symbolism of the lamb, or the teaching to be learned from the washing of the disciples' feet; her heart breaking at the thought of the treason which Judas had committed.

The moment came when Jesus, collecting Himself, and drawing the rapt attention of His disciples, "took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this

[1] See, for example, the treatise *Pesâhîm* (Jerusalem Talmud, translated by M. Schwab, vol. v. pp. 118, 120, 130, 148).

is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."[1]

Implicitly accepting the Master's word, and receiving with the deepest reverence and in silent joy His body and blood, the apostles shared in that celestial food, and then drank of the consecrated cup. Nevertheless, if the command, "Do this in remembrance of Me," was addressed to them alone thus making them priests of the new covenant, the command, "Eat and drink," was addressed to all the faithful, and to the women also who were present. And it was, above all, addressed to Mary; for if Jesus, by love, gives Himself to each christian soul, He gives Himself with a unique love to her who is, beyond all others, the well-beloved. Did Jesus distinguish her, by giving first of all to her, the sacrament of His divine love? Or did He then confide to the apostles the charge which they would soon have to exercise, the sacred trust of giving His body and His blood to those who were not ordained to the priesthood? This is entirely unknown to us. But, since it is possible that Mary was present, we may be allowed to suppose, that she then united herself sacramentally, for the first time, with the body which had been virginally formed of her in the mystery of the Incarnation. "That which the only Son of God took from our nature, He has entirely given to us again for our salvation."[2] This was verified in Mary. The humanity which Jesus had taken from her, He gave to her again, impregnated with the

[1] St Matthew xxvi. 26-28.

[2] St Thomas, opuscule lvii., *On the Eucharist*, towards the end.

vivifying power of His divinity, so that her holiness might be increased.

Mary, in fact, stands in a unique relation to the sacrament of the Eucharist. There, as in all things, she occupies a place apart, between her Son and us; like to us, for she is, as we are, sanctified by Him, but at the same time near Him, as the mediatrix of sanctification. The body of our Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, veils the sacramental elements, and is at the same time the sign and the instrument of grace. The Eucharist is a direct application of the mystery of the Incarnation, accomplished in Mary and through Mary. Jesus was made man in order that, "perceiving God visible in our flesh, we might by Him be caught up into the love of things invisible." [1]

And in the Eucharist, it is in very truth, that flesh, hidden under the visible sign of the elements but really present, which unites itself to ours, so that we may be imbued with the grace and love of the Godhead. This, then, is the mode of sanctification most suitable to our nature, to receive the invisible and divine, by means of the visible and material; and for this we are indebted to her, who has conformed the Word of God to our nature; the Eucharist is the gift of her who has given to us the flesh of Christ.

The Word, which is life, light and truth, is the true sustenance of souls; but since our souls exist in a mortal body, the Word, such as it is in the bosom of the Father, is a food too strong for us, as bread

[1] Preface at Mass on Christmas Day.

is too strong for infants. But the mother eats the bread, she assimilates it and transforms it into milk, and this milk becomes the food of her child. "The Word of God, the Son of God, the Wisdom of God, this is bread, solid food. Therefore, only those who are strong, the angels, can eat of it. We, who are weak may not taste that food because it is too solid; we who are upon the earth cannot attain to that bread because it is bread of heaven. What is the consequence? That bread descends into the breast of the blessed Virgin; there it is transformed into milk, and such milk that we are able to drink."[1] Have we not here one of the sweetest aspects of her who gave Jesus to us?

The apostles performed their thanksgiving with souls that were still preoccupied and imperfect. John leaned upon the Master's breast. By the Eucharist, by love, and by his intimacy with Jesus, he was transformed into another Jesus, and was thus prepared to become Mary's son. She, far above the apostles and the holy women, comprehended, adored, and gave thanks. She listened eagerly to the words of her Son. After bestowing on them the gift of the Eucharist, and, at the moment when He was about to render up His life, He revealed Himself to His disciples more clearly and intimately than ever. He showed them that heaven was near them, and that divine love surrounded them; that the Father cherished those who

[1] Ælred, abbot of Rievaulx: *sermo xx. in nativitate B. Mariae* (ii.), (PL. cxcv. 322-3). *Cf.* St Augustine: *ennaratio in psalmum* xxxiii., sermo 1, § 6. (PL. xxxvi. 303).

loved the Son and kept His commandments; that the Holy Ghost would come down; and that the Trinity would take up its abode in the souls of the faithful.

"Peace I leave with you," said He finally, "my peace I give unto you. . . . Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."[1] And taking, doubtless, a final farewell of His mother, He went forth with His apostles towards Gethsemane.

As to the doings and sufferings of Our Lady up to the time when she accompanied Jesus to Calvary, we have nothing but conjecture and probability to fall back upon. Conjecture concerning not only outward events but also the inner working of her mind; we know not, for example, whether she learned the course of events by natural means—as we conceive it by analogy with our own minds—or whether she was miraculously informed of all that happened to Jesus. We do not know where she retired for the night, but we picture her as remaining in the Upper Room, and perhaps even living in that hospitable house.

Since Jesus prayed and suffered agony, we think of her as also prostrated, praying like Him. Like Him, experiencing fear and terror at the thought of the hour which draws near; like Him, feeling grief for the loss of souls and the just anger of God; like

[1] St John xiv. 27-31.

Him, joining her will to the divine will, and thereby prevailing over all the shrinking of nature.

Just before midnight a disturbance was heard in the town. The noise came nearer, passed quite close to the Upper Room. Jesus had been taken, and was being conducted by His enemies to the palace of the High Priest. Then once again there was silence.

Towards two o'clock in the morning, John, the only one who remained faithful, arrived and related all that he had witnessed: Our Lord seized in the garden, led before the High Priests, interrogated by them, and condemned by the Sanhedrim. He was now imprisoned in the house of Caiaphas. At day-break the members of the Sanhedrim were to assemble a second time to judge Him, and after that He would be delivered into the hands of the governor.

With tears and prayers Our Lady waited for the break of day. When the dawn appeared, she went with John and the holy women—as nearly as we can conjecture—to the door of the palace of Caiaphas. There she saw those who were going to judge her Son. Having assembled together they entered. . . . Soon after, they came out again with a great tumult, dragging Jesus to Pilate's house.

It was then that for the first time Mary saw Jesus captive and bound, bearing in His hair, His beard, and upon His garments, traces of the insults and indignities of the night.

And from that time she sought out and followed her Son without ceasing; to the Antonia, to Herod's

palace, and back again to the Antonia, sometimes meeting Him at a turn of the street, or seeing Him in an inner court of one of the palaces, when she would exchange glances with Him. When He appeared in public, how she gazed on Him! With what anguish her heart followed Him when He entered the Prætorium, or the palace of Herod! After the scourging and the crowning with thorns, when Pilate showed Jesus to the crowd, she too saw Him, her Son! She gazed upon Him with an inexpressible grief, while around her the cries of the crowd re-echoed and penetrated to the depths of her heart, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" She was there, in that crowd, keeping a little apart, but nevertheless as near as was possible to Jesus. But in the extreme agitation of her grief she said not the least word, nor made the least gesture that was not perfectly calm. Her composure and the modesty of her bearing and of her outward appearance remained unaltered, because the composure of her soul was undisturbed. Her sorrow was boundless; it was an abyss, but an abyss which nothing could move, for in its profoundest depths dwelt an unchangeable peace.

For the last time the crowd reassembled before the Prætorium, gathering round Pilate who was seated on the judgment seat, and declared that they disowned Jesus, and that they would have no king but Cæsar. They were quite willing that the blood of the Messiah should be upon them and upon their sons. Pilate, who fully recognised the innocence of Christ, delivered Him to the

crowd; the cross was placed upon His shoulders, and soon, accompanied by two thieves who had been brought from prison to be executed, they conducted Jesus to Calvary.

According to a tradition of Jerusalem, Mary and her companions, after leaving the entrance to the Prætorium, went by a retired street which opened upon that along which Jesus was being taken. Walking quickly through the deserted little street, they reached the Way of Sorrows in the Tyropœon Valley at the bottom of the street which descended from the Prætorium. There, in the midst of the terrible procession of soldiers and thieves, Mary saw her Son, passing very close to her, stained with blood and carrying His cross. They exchanged glances, perhaps even a few words, expressing sorrow, love, sacrifice for the salvation of mankind and unity with the divine will. Tradition has preserved for us the remembrance of this moment under the name of the meeting of Jesus and His mother.

Mary, John, and the holy women, doubtless followed the sad procession. From afar, above the sea of heads, pitying or curious, Mary had a glimpse, or by the movements, the stoppages, and cries of the crowd, she could guess at what was happening: Jesus falling, the compassion shown Him by some women, and then Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross.

At length they reached Calvary. Mary was from the depths of her heart more than ever united to Jesus; like Him, silent; like Him, forgiving those

who crucified Him; and like Him, praying for us sinners, who have all shed the blood of Jesus.

Upon the hill of Calvary the friends of Jesus were reunited, and with them were the women who had followed Him from Galilee, and who had been accustomed to minister to the apostolic band; among these was the mother of James and John. They watched from afar.[1] A little group, however, approached nearer; and we know that John, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cleophas the faithful sister of Our Lady, and Mary herself were in it.[2]

It was the supreme moment of grief and of the Redemption. The sun was hidden. The cross, Calvary, and the whole world were shrouded in darkness. Jesus, abandoned by His Father, that is to say, considered by Him as the victim for our transgression and delivered up to affliction; Jesus, to whose human nature even the union with the Word no longer brought any consolation, suffered the last agonies and was overwhelmed with the final insults. Near the cross stood His mother. The sword pierced her soul; in sympathy she endured the bodily sufferings of Jesus; God united her to His deepest sufferings and to all the anguish of His heart; it was more than mortal agony, for much less would have caused the death of an ordinary

[1] St Matthew xxvii. 55, 56; St Mark xv. 40; St Luke xxiii. 49.

[2] St John xix. 25-27; the passage commented on in the following pages. The words of our Lord are interpreted according to the commonly accepted sense, but the details represent the author's personal opinion.

human being. But Mary's soul, opening out under divine influence, expanded in proportion to her super-human love. She "restrained herself"; she was not overcome by her grief, but remained in all things entirely dignified and self-possessed.[1]

She stood by, taking part in the sacrificial deed. The enemies of Jesus gathered round and overwhelmed Him with insults; His most faithful friends were filled with fear, either not understanding what was happening, or at best comprehending very imperfectly. Alone then, and in her own name—for the sacrifice was offered for her, and the blood of her Son, if it had nothing to cleanse in her, was the price of the mercy which had preserved her from all stain—and, in the name of all those she represented, she gave thanks to God through Jesus Christ, and received the redeeming and sanctifying grace of His death. And even while she represented the multitude of the redeemed, she was raised above that multitude by her divine motherhood, and, joining with the Redeemer and participating in His priesthood, she also offered and presented Him to God.

She stood, the new Eve near the new Adam. It was the antithesis and the atonement for the sin of Eden. The cross was the Tree of Life in contrast to the Tree of Death. By His implicit obedience, Jesus washed away the sin of the father of mankind; as the new head of the human race He united to Himself all the regenerated, and made them the

[1] Theological science protests against any "hysteria of the Virgin." See Terrien: *La mère de Dieu et la mère des hommes*, t. iii. p. 200-2, note.

children of God. And near Him, the new Eve, in her union with the divine will, atoned for the disobedience of the first Eve, and in her sorrow brought forth redeemed humanity.

It appears that Jesus desired to express this mystery by the words that then fell from His lips. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, he saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!" The more christian meditation is concentrated upon these words, the more apparent it becomes that they comprehend something more than the mere commendation of Mary to the care of the apostle Saint John. The occasion is too important and the hour too solemn for these words not to possess a higher meaning. Jesus beholds near Him the mother of mankind, and by her side the pure and loving disciple. Of His chosen apostle, He makes the type of the soul living in grace, regenerated by His blood, born of God and of Mary. And, proclaiming, so to speak, this spiritual motherhood, the mystery of which is in course of accomplishment, he virtually says:—

"Woman"—and that appellation, perhaps habitually used by Jesus when He spoke to His mother, received from this circumstance a new and wider meaning, and became the appropriate word by which we designate her who is both the companion of Him who is above all others the Man, and the mother of regenerated humanity—"behold him, who, born to the life of grace by the power of My blood, becomes your son, at the same time that he becomes the

son of My heavenly Father. And you, My disciple, who at this moment is become My brother, behold her who is your mother in spiritual things."

These words therefore may be applied to every soul in the proportion in which it participates or could participate in the Redemption; and Jesus, in taking John as an example and type of the redeemed, intended to make it understood of each of us, and to address to us all, the same consoling farewell. But Mary, better than all others, understood. She was in a state of extreme emotion, which made her more than usually sensitive to the sentiments of love for mankind, which Jesus desired to renew and strengthen in her. It was in a heart made tender by suffering that she received all those sons whom the divine mercy confides to her love; and in such a moment, the divine words, always efficacious, imprinted in the depths of her heart a sweet compassion and maternal tenderness for each of her new children, and for all human kind.

As to the filial care, protection, and aid due to Mary in her temporal life, all that is also included in the words of our Lord; though probably this was not their chief meaning but only a natural consequence. In the Church, the spiritual fatherhood, superior to the earthly fatherhood, is a title in virtue of which it becomes the duty of the faithful to provide for the needs of their fathers in God, that is to say, of the apostles and pastors. Nevertheless, this fatherhood of the pastors and apostles, worthy and dignified as it is, is greatly inferior to the spiritual motherhood of Mary. And therefore, in view of this

motherhood the disciples of Jesus were bound, in a much greater degree, to take care of her and provide for her wants during the time that she dwelt upon earth after the death of her Son. But it was Saint John who was chosen upon Calvary as the representative of the human race, and who received personally the injunction of the Master. His obligation thus rested upon a special title, and the duty became incumbent upon him in particular to provide for the needs of the Holy Virgin. He realised this duty, and "from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.[1]

All was finished. With a loud cry, Jesus committed His spirit into the hands of His Father, bowed His head, and expired. While the crowd passed by and beat upon their breasts, Mary and the friends of the Saviour remained at the foot of the cross. Love would not permit them to leave the body of the Master, and they waited in the hope of being able, without yet knowing how they might find the means, to bury Him.

After this came the soldiers, who were sent to dispatch those of the condemned who were not already dead. The morrow's Sabbath was especially solemn; many, particularly among the priests and those of the upper classes, considered it, that year, as the true day of the Feast of the Passover. They

[1] This might also be translated: "He took her into his possession," literally "into that which he owned." See also this same expression "εἰς τὰ ἴδια," in St John i. 11 and xvi. 32, and in Acts xxi. 6.

wished to hide from sight the repugnant spectacle of the crucified victims, before the setting of the sun should mark the beginning of the great day. The legs of the thieves were broken. Mary trembled lest, yet again, the body of her Son should be insulted. But the soldiers perceived that Jesus was already dead, and one of them plunged his spear into the right side of the Saviour, and out of it there flowed forth a stream of blood and water. If the soul of Mary was yet once again pierced by that fresh stab, she was now too enlightened not to comprehend in all its austere beauty the mystery of that wounded side of Christ. The heart of the Redeemer, in letting flow these last drops of the blood He shed for us, revealed His unspeakable love. The water signified baptism; the blood, the Eucharist; and, under the symbol of these sacraments which give and sustain the life of the Church, it is the Church itself which seems to be born from that open heart. As the companion of the first Adam issued from his side during his mysterious sleep, so did the Church come forth from the side of Christ while He slept upon the cross. This birth of regenerated mankind, which was expressed in the words, "Behold thy Son!" was now expressed by the symbol of blood and water in its turn.

Finally, two new-comers appeared, and this time they were friends. Joseph, originally from Arimathea, one of the few members of the Sanhedrim who were favourable to Jesus, and Nicodemus, also of the Sanhedrim and a doctor of the Law, who had already had some private intercourse with the

Master; and both were accompanied by servants. Joseph had obtained from Pilate permission to bury Jesus, and he offered for this purpose his own tomb which was already prepared in his garden situated at a little distance from Calvary. He brought a white linen cloth in which to shroud the body; Nicodemus added perfumes, about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes.

The body was taken down from the cross, and we may suppose that Mary gave it a last long embrace. There is still shown between the site of the cross and that of the sepulchre, a kind of stone platform, quite low, but very long and wide. It is called the stone of anointing; and it was on this, says tradition, that the body of the Saviour received the last ministrations. It was perhaps upon this stone that Mary was seated, as christian piety represents her. In her arms she supported the head and shoulders of her Son, while she gazed at him in silence. What feelings must have flooded her heart at that final contemplation! Love of God who has loved men so well, horror of the sin which had been the cause of this death, but nevertheless mercy and prayer for the sinners, and even maternal tenderness towards those for whom Jesus had sacrificed His life. And her tears flowed also upon her only Son, for the sword, as had been predicted, pierced to the depths of her heart; henceforth she was alone and forsaken in the world. She is Our Lady of Pity, because her soul melted in pity and compassion for the sufferings of Jesus; Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, because at that moment

she recalled with intensity all the bitterness of her life. Beautiful in past days as Jerusalem, she is to-day as sad as Jerusalem in captivity, wrecked and "ravaged" in the day of the anger of the Lord:—

> Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
> Behold, and see
> If there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow . . .
> What thing shall I take to witness for thee?
> What thing shall I liken to thee,
> O daughter of Jerusalem?
> What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee,
> O Virgin daughter of Zion?
> For thy breach is great like the sea:
> Who can heal thee?[1]

Reverently the friends of Jesus were obliged to interrupt Mary's silent prayer, for sunset drew nigh, and it was necessary to hasten their preparations. The body sacrificed for us was washed, anointed with perfumes, and wrapped in bands of linen. After this it was carried into the tomb and placed upon the stone prepared to receive it; then, according to the eastern custom, the entrance to the cave of sepulture was closed with a large stone. Mary Magdalene and Mary of Cleophas would not leave their beloved Master, and silently they seated themselves opposite the tomb.[2]

Local tradition appears to suggest that Mary, unable now to do more, would not go far away from the remains of her Son, and that she awaited His resurrection in a house quite near, perhaps in a dwelling close by the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. It

[1] Lamentations i. 12; ii. 13. [2] St Matthew xxvii. 61.

appears more probable however, and more in accordance with the Gospel text, that "from that hour," she followed John to the humble abode in which he dwelt at Jerusalem. It was there, it seems, that Mary passed those two nights of death and that memorable day of Saturday.

> She weepeth sore in the night,
> And her tears are on her cheeks:
> Among all her lovers
> She hath none to comfort her. [1]

Vainly the holy women and her adopted son gathered round her; there was only One who could have given her consolation, and He had departed.

However, we cannot doubt but that her inexhaustible love gave her strength to talk with the disciples and apostles, who, on Saturday, returned in fear and trembling to join the group of the faithful. She received and consoled them, more than ever mother, now that she alone must watch over them. She sought to revive in their troubled souls faith in the resurrection. The faith that Christ would vanquish death never faltered or wavered in her most pure soul. And one of the reasons why christian piety has made that Saturday especially sacred to her, seems to be because she preserved and vivified in the infant Church that faith in the Messiah, already glorious in her soul and soon to be raised to life again.

How was it, that amid that steadfast and near hope, her pain was so acute at having lost Jesus? But how was it that Jesus Himself, whose soul never lost the beatific vision of God, could, during His

[1] Lamentations i. 2.

Passion, suffer so intensely in His soul, and suffer in it even separation from God? The power and wisdom of Him to whom all hearts are open, and in whose keeping were those two hearts above all others, explains at once this twofold mystery. Without seeking too deeply here to know the cause of Christ's desolation, it was the divine will that Mary, during those days, should suffer with Jesus, that she should endure for all humanity that great grief for the death of God made man, and that her suffering should be intense. And, though fully mistress of her mind and feelings, heavenly wisdom turned Mary's thoughts aside from consoling visions, or ordained that the sweetest truths should bring no consolation. On the contrary, she directed all her thoughts and recollections towards the things that could afflict her, without ceasing recalling to her memory and imagination the terrible Passion in which her Son had been taken away. She saw again all the past trials of her Son, with all the sufferings which they entailed upon her and which she endured for Him and with Him; she saw in the future the separation which must soon follow the triumph of the Resurrection; then, the struggles of the infant Church, the stubbornness of the Jews, their reprobation, and the loss of souls,—and everything, just as it happens to us in our sorrows, presented itself to her under its most profoundly sad and most grievous aspect.

Jesus had had to suffer bodily death, and was, even then, enclosed within the tomb. Why could not Mary have died with Him through her heart? Or,

rather, why should not her heart remain shrouded in death with the body of her Son? Christ's Passion was the work of such love as never lived in the greatest human heart; and Mary's compassion was also the work of a love, which, after that of Jesus, no other has ever equalled. "He only is astonished at this, who forgets that Saint Paul reckons it one of the chief faults of the pagans, that they are without affection. Far from the heart of Mary be any such reproach, and far be it also from the souls of her servants."[1]

[1] St Bernard: *Sermon on the twelve stars* (PL. clxxxi. 275).

## CHAPTER X

THE RESURRECTION—THE FORTY DAYS—THE ASCENSION —THE PRAYER IN THE UPPER ROOM, AND PENTECOST (MARCH, APRIL, AND MAY OF THE YEAR 29 ?)

THIS Jesus, "God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." [1]

It is thus that Saint Peter spoke of the resurrection of Christ, and of the mission of announcing it to all men which he and his fellow disciples had received. God chose His witnesses for this striking event upon which the new faith is founded, and in order that the truth might be widely established, He took them from all ranks of the Church. Devoted and loving women, who had followed the Master, and had not forsaken Him even in death; disciples, who formed the body of the christian brotherhood; apostles, who were to have charge of the work of extending and governing it. And these shepherds of souls were specially chosen to

[1] Acts x. 40-42.

be not only witnesses but preachers also of the risen Christ.

But Mary had no part in this. She was too closely connected with Jesus, her dignity was too exalted for her to be ranked among witnesses. Her sex, and even more emphatically, her dignity, excluded her from the rank of preachers and apostles; and the order of the hypostatic union, to which she had been elevated by her divine motherhood, was incomparably higher than either the apostolic order or the order of the gospel ministry. Neither do we find her mentioned in the list of apostles and holy women to whom, according to the sacred narrative, were granted the first appearances of Jesus.

But it by no means follows that she had to wait longer than these others to gaze on Him who had risen from the dead. Her claims were different, and they were in all respects superior to those of the others; and everything indicates that Mary, being of a higher rank, and also of a rank apart, took part in the joys of the Resurrection both before the others and in a greater degree. Scripture, which "assumes that we have intelligence," [1] has left to the knowledge of the learned and the piety of the faithful, the easy task of divining the beautiful secret of Jesus and His mother; and it is believed by all of them that Mary was the first to be illumined with the risen light of Christ. Had she not, more than all others, sorrowed with His

[1] Saint Ignatius: *Spiritual Exercises* (Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord: the Resurrection of Christ and His first appearance).

sorrows? "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul."[1] But above all, was she not His mother? And does not the thought present itself, as a kind of spiritual evidence, that the loving Jesus, so perfectly affectionate and attentive in consoling each one of His own, should first consider His mother? Filial affection and the law of nature demanded it; for so close was the bond between Mary and Jesus from the hour of the Incarnation, that even in the mystery of the resurrection of Christ, Mary has her part.

Because the Father gave eternal life to the Word, He said to Him from the beginning: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." And since the human nature of Christ exists in the Word and participates in His Sonship, the Father says the same words to the Word incarnate, in the eternal present, and He says them especially at those moments when the Word begins or renews His human life. "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee," are the words of the Father on the day of the Incarnation, on the day of the Nativity, and also on the day of the Resurrection. Mary, who alone with the Father could say: "Thou art my Son," could not add on that Easter morning, "This day have I begotten Thee," for her act is not, like God's, permanent and always in force. But she could say, full of joy and in all truth: "Thou art my Son, even in the splendour of Thy glory; the humanity which to-day is new-born from

[1] Psalm xciv. 19.

the tomb, is He who formerly was born of me; and if, three days ago, a part of myself did suffer, to-day, a part of myself is glorified." And she could say further: "Thou art my Son, for the triumph of to-day did I conceive Thee." For yet again, when Mary, different from other women, voluntarily became a mother knowing and assenting to her Son's mission, she acquiesced in His glory as well as in His sufferings. She said "Yes" to the angel, not merely to become the mother of the Saviour, but also to become the mother of the Judge and the Conqueror; she gave to the world not only the Redeemer destined to die on the cross, but the King whose dominion shall have no end. And if the consent then given brought her the nearest to the cross, it also gave her the right to be the first to hear the words, "I am risen from the dead, and behold, I am with you again."

Perhaps, if we carried this reasoning further, we might even be led to ask whether Mary had not a vision of the Resurrection itself; whether she may not have been permitted to contemplate the Father calling His Son from the tomb; to behold the divinity of the Word reuniting the body and soul from which it was inseparable, and infusing into them a new and inalienable life; to watch Christ leaving the rock without breaking the seals of the stone; and, at His entry into glory, to witness Him receive the adoration of the angels. Without insisting on a conjecture which has not often been clearly formulated, and which is perhaps open to some objections, we must at least admit that Jesus may have shown

Himself to His mother very soon after the Resurrection. And that moment of new birth was, like the birth at Bethlehem, one of those moments when the Holy Trinity appears to have been revealed to her soul as clearly as was possible, even the vision of the Heavenly Presence, if such a vision is compatible with the state of this earthly life.

But this manifestation of the fulness of divine glory into which her Son entered, could scarcely be borne without some preparation. How was it possible that Mary should pass without any transition from the extreme of sadness to such excess of joy? During those three days of tears and bitter suffering she had been cast into such deep physical dejection, that it was necessary she should be strengthened and fortified at the approach of this new state of happiness. Did God, who directed her thoughts and affections, change their course as the light of dawn appeared in the sky on that first day of the week? Did He then bring to her recollection the promise of Jesus, with that charm of hope sure in itself, just at the time when it was about to be fulfilled? Or did Jesus send an angel before Him, to carry to Mary the first "alleluia"? Or did He reveal Himself to her by degrees like those absent ones returning, whose voices we hear in the distance before actually seeing them? Or did His sovereign hand, so tender and yet so powerful, sustain His mother, and accustom her gradually to her excessive happiness?

Whatever may have been the means employed by

divine wisdom, He who had given Mary strength to endure more than any ordinary woman and mother could have endured, gave her strength also to sustain a joy which far surpassed all other earthly joys.[1] How that humble room in John's house was illuminated and magnified! Jesus was there in the glory of the Father, surrounded by angels and accompanied by the souls of all the righteous whose prison gates He had opened. And neither this glory nor the brilliant retinue in any way impeded their intimate intercourse. Amidst all His splendour as the Son of God, He was still the Son of Mary, devoting Himself to His mother, consoling her, and talking with her of past sorrows which would never return, and of the joy and glory which would be eternal. "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive," said the aged Jacob when he found again his lost son; and Mary could repeat the words in her heart, "It is enough for me, my Son is yet alive." All those consoling words which were soon to bring joy to the first among the faithful, resounded beforehand in her soul, "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. If then Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, we also are risen with Him. Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me." Mary read these, and other thoughts beside, in the divine glory of Jesus; she tasted their consoling sweetness; she treasured them in her heart, as a living source, from whence

[1] It will be readily seen that what is here said, as well as what will be said a little further on, concerning the intercourse between Jesus and Mary, is only conjecture and probability.

christian generations would soon draw the waters of Paschal joy.

Nevertheless, we do not read that, like Mary Magdalene and the other holy women, Mary was constrained to speak, announcing the resurrection of her Son, and calling upon all to believe it. That part was not hers. We picture her reserved and silent, but fully consoled, and saying, not so much by her words as by her attitude, "The Lord is risen indeed," and in the midst of all the hesitation and the discussion by the friends of Jesus, disseminating through her sweet influence her peace and joy.

During forty days Jesus in many ways showed Himself living to His disciples, appearing to them and talking with them. He must also have visited His mother privately and intimately. The great confidences which they then exchanged, treated perhaps of the blessed life, of the delights of heaven, and of all that glory in view of which God wills or permits the trials and the sufferings of this present life. Jesus spoke to all of "the kingdom of God," and He doubtless spoke fully of this kingdom as it would be in this world; with His mother He may perhaps have dwelt on its consummation. While awaiting His entry into heaven and His triumphant enthronement on the right hand of the Father, He inaugurated magnificently for mankind the order of the blessed life, by the glorifying of His body and His soul, and also by the glorifying of all the righteous who had died since the beginning of the world, whom He took with Him into the joy and the

vision of God. Perhaps He spoke to His mother of that multitude of the elect who had preceded Him, of those who would follow Him, and of all those children of God, of whom He was, transcendentally, the first-born. And Mary contemplated beforehand the upward journeying of the bride, the Church militant, towards the Bridegroom, through the ages up to the final triumph, when time would be ended and the New Jerusalem would close its doors behind the last of its entrants. Oh, how she then saw epitomised in her Son, all the history of the world; how she comprehended through Him that divine law which placed salvation in the Cross, which through humiliation and suffering led the way to glory, which gave to time a brief and fleeting sorrow, and which, for joy and rest, reserved all eternity!

It is believed that, during those forty days, Mary was present at most of the appearances of Jesus to His disciples. Whether it was in the Upper Room where, with closed doors, He came to visit His own, or whether it was upon the hill of Galilee at one of the last meetings, Mary was at these precious interviews in which the Master perfected the hearts of His disciples by showing them His own, and revealing its love, its tenderness, and its depths.

It is thought by all that she was there at the departure of Jesus. She was at that last meal which the Saviour took with His apostles. As at the Last Supper, Jesus ended with His farewell and final counsels, but with what a difference! Here, all was joy and peace. It seems, in fact, that Mary felt no sadness on the day of the Ascension.

There was indeed the separation from Jesus; but God willed that the mother of the Redeemer should be so united to her Son in joy as well as in sorrow, that it appears that it did not cause her grief to see Him ascend into heaven. Sadness at the separation existed however, and was felt, but rather by anticipation, at the time of the death of Jesus, and later, under another aspect, in her last years. In the day of her Son's triumph, Mary felt nothing but joy and triumph also. She was therefore, at the time of the Ascension, entirely in sympathy with Jesus; she rejoiced in her union with Him, and she knew that this departure presaged the coming hour when she herself would be with Him, in the bliss of heaven. Above all, she loved. "If ye loved me," said Jesus, "ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."[1] No one loved as did Mary, neither so deeply nor so truly, and no one therefore could rejoice as she did, in the joy of the King of Glory.

From the Upper Room, which seems to have been the place of the last meal, the Saviour brought the disciples to the Mount of Olives, upon the road to Bethany, having either directed them to meet Him there, or having, invisible to other people, walked with them from Jerusalem. And upon this same mountain where He had endured His agony, He for the last time smiled upon the little band gathered round Him, and perhaps, walking among them, He said to each a special farewell. To His mother in particular, Jesus must have addressed one of those

[1] St John xiv. 28.

sayings in which He was accustomed to convey so much meaning, and which for long after brought balm and comfort to the soul. This was the day of the earthly farewell, before the final, the celestial, the eternal reunion.

Then Jesus, lifting His hands, already assumed the attitude which He preserves on the right hand of the Father: that of prayer which calls down grace upon us, grace which is the fruit of the Passion and showers upon us the benedictions of God. And while He blessed the kneeling group, the Master was taken from them, and carried up into heaven. . . . A cloud received Him out of their sight.

Mary also followed Him with her eyes, filled with unspeakable love and ineffable hope. At this moment, when her Son went to take His place on the right hand of the Father, how her grandeur shone forth! During His mortal life the splendour of her Son was hidden, and as a result, Mary, in the eyes of men, was merely the mother of a man. But now, Jesus is manifested in all His glory, and the Father receives Him on His throne. Mary is truly the mother of Him who, one with the Father, is seated at His right hand, and with Him, is about to send down the Holy Ghost. At the moment when the heavens opened to receive Jesus, they opened also to reveal the greatness of the mother of God.

The cloud, however, closed again upon Jesus. The two angels in white garments, sent to warn the apostles that He will one day come again to judge

the world, had disappeared. The first disciples of the Saviour were alone upon earth with their mother Mary. They travelled the Sabbath day's journey, about fifteen hundred yards, which separated the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, and re-entered the Upper Room to prepare themselves for the coming of the Holy Ghost.

Apostles and disciples, to the approximate number of one hundred and twenty persons, formed the nucleus of the Church, the most fervent among those who believed in Christ, and who, believing His word, now awaited in faith the hour of the great illuming of the Paraclete. Each day they came from their dwellings and gathered together to pass long hours in prayer at the same place, now become a sanctuary, where Jesus had instituted the Eucharist. There were among them some holy women; the relatives of the Lord, James and Jude, numbered among the apostles, and two others, Simon and Joses, who were not of the apostolic band; the eleven apostles, of which Saint Peter completed the number by the addition of Saint Matthias; finally, above the faithful, above the hierarchy, in a more elevated rank, was "Mary the mother of Jesus,"[1] teaching them all to continue with one accord in prayer and supplication, and in her heart uniting, symbolising, and amplifying the prayers of all the Church.

And this Church which Jesus had bought and established with His blood, in which He had apportioned to each his function and degree, wanted but

[1] Acts i. 14.

one thing, a final inspiring breath, which should give fulness to its life and stir it to immediate action. Christ had promised this completion of His work, by means of the Holy Ghost. For the whole Trinity took part in the work of founding the Church, and in the sanctification of souls. The Father is the source of every perfect gift; He gave us the Son, and with and by the Son He gives us the Holy Spirit. And, even as the Holy Spirit is the end of the essential and spiritual operations of God, it is also the last gift which outwardly completes the divine work.

It was the fiftieth day after the Resurrection, about nine o'clock in the morning, that a great noise as of a rushing mighty wind which filled the whole house, announced to the apostles the coming of the Comforter. There appeared in the Upper Room, cloven tongues like as of fire, which rested on the head of each of them. Immediately they were filled with holy rapture; prayers and thanksgivings in all tongues burst from their hearts in which the divine fire had been kindled by the Holy Ghost. When the people heard of this, they gathered together, and, for the first time, Peter, in the name of the twelve apostles, gave witness to Christ, and there were added to the Church three thousand disciples.

More deeply imbued with the Holy Spirit, and more tranquil in her thanksgiving, Mary remained praying, and yet once again, gave thanks to God for the great things He had done for her. The Paraclete descended upon her as upon all the others;

to reach the others, that grace had, so to speak, passed through her, that is to say it had been drawn down by her mediation and her prayers. God, who descended to visit the Upper Room, had, by a fresh and unfathomable pouring out, increased the holiness and the abundance of the seven gifts in her soul. He had also conferred or augmented in her, those other marvellous gifts so celebrated in the early Church under the name of "charisms," that is to say, "gifts" of the Holy Spirit.[1] We may therefore piously think that in all probability these gifts, which God distributed among the members of the first christian communities, were all bestowed on Mary, and in an abundant degree. In the use of them, however, she must have allowed herself to be guided by divine wisdom, and have acted in accordance with her mission, which, higher than the priesthood or the apostolate, was formally, neither that of apostle nor priest. The grace of Pentecost therefore conferred upon her, or perfected in her, that "faith" which works wonders; the "gift of miracles," and the "gift of tongues," to be used according to circumstances, and with the most perfect wisdom; the "discerning of spirits," the "interpretation of tongues," and "prophecy," for the purpose of reading hearts, penetrating into mysteries, and occasionally, when it pleased God, foretelling the future; "prophecy," again, in the sense in which the word was often used then, the "word of wisdom," and the "word of knowledge," not for preaching in the public

[1] See 1 Corinthians xii. 8-10 and 28; Ephesians iv. 11.

assemblies, but rather for instructing and touching the heart in private discourse. And most certainly the "gifts of healing and help" were the privileges of the ever-pitying Virgin.

On that day, the Holy Spirit descending upon all, confirmed and perfected each in his degree and function. He fortified the simple faithful in the christian life, and the apostles in the apostolate. And He consecrated Mary anew in her part of mother of grace in relation to the Church and the faithful. Descending upon her on the day of the Annunciation, He had ordained that she should become the mother of Jesus. To-day, as an addition to the treasure of her maternal virtues, already so incomparably rich, He constituted her, the mother of Christ the Redeemer, as the mother of the mystic body of Christ, which was now confided to her care.

## CHAPTER XI

THE LAST YEARS (FROM THE YEAR 29 TO ABOUT 41 OR 42 ?)—MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE FAITHFUL—HER VIRTUE AND INFLUENCE—SAINT JOHN, THE PATTERN OF HER TRUE SONS—THE REIGN OF LOVE IN MARY'S SOUL

ZEBEDEE, the father of James and John, was a fisher of Galilee, and probably of Bethsaida. We know that he had hired servants in his employment;[1] he was therefore a boat-owner, enjoying a certain amount of ease. This would not have been sufficient to make him one of the chief among the leading men of Galilee, but it renders less improbable what is written in an ancient chronicle: "After the death of Zebedee his father, John sold the portion of goods which he had left to him in Galilee, and bought property in Jerusalem. He also said of himself that he was known to the high-priest.[2] He it was who received the saintly Mary in his dwelling at Zion until the day of her Assumption. After her Assumption he preached the word at Ephesus in Asia, and it was there that God took him from the world."[3]

[1] St Mark i. 20. [2] St John xviii. 15.

[3] Hippolytus of Thebes, fragment I, n. v. (ed. Diekamp, Münster, 1898, p. 6-7). In the second part of this edition,

Besides, we are at liberty to explain otherwise and more simply the connection of Saint John with Jerusalem. It is at least quite as probable to suppose that, even during the lifetime of Zebedee, they went to the capital to sell the fish caught in the lake, that they had a house there which served as a shop, and that the Galilean merchants were not unknown in the pontifical palace. But beyond all these hypotheses, it is certain that after the final injunction of the Master, Mary lived with Saint John; and according to a quite probable tradition which is supported by the Gospel text itself,[1] the house in which they dwelt together belonged to Saint John or to his family. This house was, in all likelihood, reserved for their use, when the first faithful renounced their private possessions, and had all their goods in common.

Local tradition is not quite clear as to the exact site of the house. Some ancient evidences speak of Mary's sojourn in the valley of Jehoshaphat, that is to say, near the place which is now shown as her tomb. Others say that it was at the south-west of the town, on the hill of Zion, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Upper Room. This is the piece of land which the Emperor William II acquired in 1898, and gave to the German catholics. Since then there has been much discussion as to the authenticity of the associations which have gathered

pp. 88-113, M. Diekamp indicates the various traditions and the important ancient texts which relate to the last years of the Virgin Mary.

[1] St John xix. 27.

round it. Upon this probable site of Mary's dwelling, the church of the "Dormition" has been built.

According to the best founded opinion, Our Lady, so long as she lived, hardly ever went away from Jerusalem.[1] It may be that at times she went with Saint John to revisit Galilee, or yet again, she may have accompanied him in his journeys to Samaria, or upon the borders of Palestine. We may suppose still further that John, departing on some short mission at a little distance away, left her sometimes in the care of other faithful disciples. But these two seem to have habitually resided in the holy city, and the missions of the son of Zebedee, so long as

[1] I consider it therefore most probable, not only that Mary did not die at Ephesus or in its neighbourhood, but that she never even went to Asia Minor. The letter of the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus (Mansi: *Consilia*, t. iv., col. 1241), often quoted, does not appear to say that Mary ever came to that town. Some years ago there was a fresh discussion on the question on account of the following fact: Anne Catherine Emmerich, in her visions, edited by Clement Brentano, said that the Holy Virgin died near Ephesus, in a house which she described minutely; then, in 1891, the French missionaries established at Smyrna, priests of the Congregation of the Mission, went to explore Bulbul-Dagh, a mountain near the ruins of Ephesus, and there found, in the place called Panaghia-Capouli (the door of the All Holy) an ancient house or chapel, which appeared to them, as to other travellers since, to agree with the indications given by the seer; and that discovery was, it appears, confirmed by a local tradition of the inhabitants of Kirkindjeh, descendants of the Ephesians. Evidently, when it is proved that the description of the house near Ephesus and other details relative to the death of Mary, contained in the visions of Catherine Emmerich, proceed from a divine revelation, it will only be necessary to adjust and to correct, in accordance with that which God has made known to his servant, some of the ideas which at present seemed to be a part of the true

Mary lived, do not appear to have taken him very far from the land of Israel.

Holy Scripture says nothing of the life led by the mother of Jesus in that retreat, nor of the influence which she exercised on those around her. God seems to have willed that we should only be able to guess at much concerning the great mystery which encompassed Mary. Scripture gives a few indications which are at the same time reserved and enlightening, and the rest it has left to the reflection and love of the faithful. During the life of Jesus, Mary is revealed to us on occasions of special importance, and almost always at periods of the manifestation

history of the apostolic era. I am ready to make these corrections, if ever the divine origin of Anna Catherine's story comes to be recognised ; but it appears to me that that day has not yet arrived. I do not think that the possibility of a natural explanation of the description, and of the coincidence (which moreover does not seem to have struck everyone) between the description and the discovery of 1891, has been exhausted. The errors, and especially the numerous and indisputably fantastical features, which are contained in the "revelations" published by Clement Brentano, necessitate a discreet reserve as to the weight to be attached to this work and to the teachings which it implies. And besides, there are very good reasons for maintaining the tradition of Jerusalem against the claims of Ephesus. The principal of these are : 1st. The direct assertions in favour of Jerusalem, which are quite as strong as the local tradition of the Kirkindjotes in favour of Ephesus ; 2nd. What is still more important, a careful study of the *Acts* and of the history of the apostles seems to bring out very clearly the following conclusions : that Saint John did not go to Ephesus before Saint Paul ; that Saint Paul founded the church of Ephesus about the year 55, most probably after the death of Mary ; and finally, that Saint John came there only after the year 60, or possibly after the death of Saint Paul (67), or even (Fouard : *Saint Jean*) after the destruction of Jerusalem (70).

of grace. And in the same way, at the beginning of the *Acts*, she is there in the midst of the Church, the bond of unity and love, the centre of the apostles and with the faithful grouped around her. After having that first scene recalled to us, we are left to suppose that Mary remained the centre of the Church, and was upon earth the soul of the new-born community. But we can only conjecture exactly what she did, or how her influence was manifested; and this mysterious half-light well becomes Mary's modesty. It harmonises also with her part in life as woman and mother, she who is of so much importance in the family, but is often apparently kept in the background; a sweet and far reaching influence of love, which can understand so well the hearts of her children. And it is in this way, by the aid of the principles of faith, added to what is otherwise known of Mary, that christian meditation has learned to comprehend the life of Our Lady during her last years.

She is the very sweet and holy bond which has united Jesus to humanity. It was necessary that she should be here before Him to receive and give Him to the world; it was necessary that she should remain after He had gone, that she might teach men to look to Him, to live in Him, and to apply to themselves the fruits of His redemption. It was her heavenly mission to minister to the body of Christ. But the body of Christ is not only that divine flesh, formerly nourished by her, afterwards suffering, and finally glorified; it is the Church also. Since the grace of the children of God by adoption is so great,

it creates such a close bond of union between Christ and those who are His own, that the faithful are members of the same body with Him, their Head. The person of Jesus and the Church form together the whole body of Christ. It was of the whole Christ that Mary was the mother; and therefore as she had aided Jesus at Bethlehem and Nazareth, so must she also assist the new-born Church, and lead it towards the adult state of christian life and spirit.

To do this, like a mother, she taught at first by example. A mother prays, draws near to receive the sacraments, and in this way teaches her children to do as she does. And thus did Mary. She was a pattern for us all to follow in the matter of prayer, whether in the silence of home, or in the Temple. For they continued to gather together in the Temple. It was still for them a venerated place, and there was nothing to prevent the faithful from going with the Jews to sing the praises of the one God and Father, or to go up there for private prayer. The apostles also sometimes taught in the Temple as Jesus had done, and usually went by preference to Solomon's porch, where, not long before, the Master had spoken to the multitude.[1]

There was, however, one ceremony that was not performed in the Temple at Jerusalem, for it belonged essentially to the religion founded by Jesus. It was in groups and in houses that they celebrated the religious rite, mysteriously designated by the name of "breaking of bread."[2] According to the *Acts*, and

[1] St Luke xxiv. 53; Acts ii. 46; v. 12, 42.

[2] Acts ii. 42, 46.

in some passages of the *Epistles*, it appears that the apostles, literally faithful to the command to do in memory of the Master that which He had Himself done, repeated what they had witnessed at the Last Supper. As on the evening of Holy Thursday, a meal appears to have been associated with the prayers, hymns, and consecration which formed the Eucharistic rite. If this was so, we can conceive of nothing more holy, excepting the feast in which Jesus gave Himself to His disciples, than the moment when, at those commemorations at which Mary was present and took part, the mystery was renewed by the hands of Saint John.

But the knowledge of to-day recognises that we are very ignorant concerning the primitive liturgy. It may have been that the sacramental feast was celebrated apart from the ordinary meal. But the important points remain undisputed: from the first days of the Church the Eucharist was the centre and spirit of these intimate gatherings; they met in prayer and thanksgiving to celebrate it; the apostle who presided, in repeating the words of Jesus and transforming the bread into His body and the wine into His blood, thus reproduced in a sacramental manner, the sacrifice of Calvary; he then presented to the faithful, the sacrificed flesh of Christ and His cup of salvation. It was thus, for Mary, the daily visit of her Son. With what extraordinary fervour she must have taken part in the prayers then used; and how, to all those around, she must have given the example of receiving the sacred elements with outward reverence and inward devotion! In those

times, each one uttered freely the holy thoughts which were communicated to him by the Spirit of God; and perhaps she, too, without departing from the reserve prescribed for women, may have allowed something of the transport of her soul to appear to others, carrying with her the faithful in her worship, her requests, and her thanksgivings. And perhaps on other days and at other times, she set them the lesson of her silence, of her modestly retiring attitude, or of her profound contemplation. Then also, without doubt, when the meeting was dispersed, she continued alone her communings with Him who was the life of her soul. She was the first among women who worshipped Jesus in His sacrament; she taught the Church with what respect, purity, and love, it is necessary to approach this mystery; and the multitudes which for nineteen centuries have knelt before the hidden God, cannot please Him better than by following the inclinations manifested in the heart of His mother in those far-off days.

Mary's sweet influence must certainly have been felt by those who visited her, and in the conversations which she held with many faithful souls. She was surrounded not only by the circle of women named in the Gospels, but that circle widened each day. The ordinary companions of Mary brought to her others who were won to the faith, from Jerusalem, from Samaria, and from Galilee. Mary's conversation enlightened and transformed their hearts, even more than the regular catechising which prepared them for baptism. She filled them with joy, for she helped them to comprehend better what inestimable

blessings Jesus Christ had brought into the world. She taught them thanksgiving for the unspeakable gift of God; the spirit of prayer by which comes perseverance and purity of life; a scorn of the riches of this world, for the heart of the christian should be in heaven with Jesus; charity, which cleaves to God, and which through God loves all creation; love, which casts itself upon the Person of Jesus, and which, seeing in Him both God and man, through Him loves both God and, in God, man also. This is the whole spirit of the Gospel, and it is this spirit which the mother inspires in her children.

The christian life was not only in individual souls, it became the social life of the Church. The community was organised and formed into groups and classes upon which Mary's influence could not but have made itself felt. Virginity began to be recognised as a christian virtue. Already the Church honoured, as a virgin, Martha the sister of Lazarus. And must not contact with the one Virgin above all others have purified and elevated that soul, as well as many others of whose names we are ignorant? And as, at that remote epoch, virgins were included in the christian society, so also widows formed a distinct group. From the earliest days there had been poor widows, who were assisted daily from the resources of the christian community; and later, perhaps also earlier, there were richer widows, who exercised a kind of diaconate, consecrated to the practice of good works.[1] The Virgin Mary, who was also the example for widows, being the widow of

[1] See Acts vi. 1.; 1 Timothy v. 9-10, 16.

Joseph, and yet more the widow upon earth of her Son and of her God, inspired some of these with a love of poverty, others with love for the poor, and all with detachment from the world and joy in piety.

These women were not the only ones who had intercourse with her. Those who were converted were doubtless presented to her, especially the most notable. She extended her care even to the members of the hierarchy. It has always been thought that the apostles went to her for enlightenment; for, as we see by more than one episode in the *Acts*, the grace of Pentecost did not enlighten them all at once as to what should be done on each occasion of difficulty. And at that time, when it was a question of applying to the things of daily life the religious transformation which the Messiah had wrought in their souls, of detaching themselves by degrees from ancient ceremonies, of uniting in one Church Jews and baptised heathens, of placing upon an immovable basis a religion destined to endure as long as the world, difficult and delicate questions must have daily presented themselves. In addition to the promised and unfailing help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had left to His apostles His mother, the throne of wisdom and the treasury of good counsel. To govern was not her mission; decision and authority remained in the hands of the appointed heads; but it was a useful and sweet privilege for these to come to seek light and consolation in her presence.

It appears that Mary must have been acquainted with each of the four Evangelists. It is certain that

she was with Saint Matthew, for he was one of the twelve. Saint Mark could not have been unknown to her, for his mother, one of the holy women who bore the name of Mary, was among the most well-known christians in Jerusalem, and owned one of the houses in which the faithful gathered in great numbers.

We are not so clear as to the precise period at which Saint Luke may have become known to Mary. But from the earliest times down to our own day, it has often been said, and with some probability, that she must have known him. The evangelist himself favours this supposition since he remarks on two occasions, as though he wished us to guess who was his authority, that "Mary kept all these things in her heart." He probably came from Antioch, and does not appear to have been a disciple of Jesus Himself, but to have been converted some years after the Ascension. He might easily have come to Jerusalem shortly before the death of Mary. A zealous christian, he was desirous of setting down correctly the whole gospel history,[1] and it would be for him an inexpressible happiness to see and question the mother of Jesus. And she, kind and courteous to all, perhaps even prophetically informed concerning the work as historian for which God had destined the young doctor, confided to him her recollection of the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the holy childhood of Jesus. There is, for those who can perceive, a story transmitted by her, in the episode of the penitent thief whose conversion is

[1] St Luke i. 1-4.

recounted by Saint Luke. And speaking generally, is the influence of Mary entirely foreign to that spirit of compassionate mercy which pervades the whole of the third Gospel? Doubtless the companion of Saint Paul wrote for those christians who in great measure had been recruited from the Gentiles; and it was necessary to show them that the grace and pardon of Christ, excluded neither pagan, nor publican, nor the most hardened of sinners; and this object of his book serves to explain much of its character. But still, in order that the work might be executed in accordance with this design, is it not probable that God permitted the evangelist some converse with the "mother of mercy?"[1]

John had been chosen by Jesus as the type of him who becomes a true son of Mary; and this view of the beloved apostle should be contemplated by all those who also desire worthily to bear that title. He was pleasing to Jesus because, faithful to the first divine grace, he had kept his soul pure, and had opened his heart, free from all earthly attachment, to the love of his God. Jesus also opened His heart to him, and as has been already remarked, with His heart, He gave him His cross and His mother. Three divine gifts which are each the same: for could one find the heart of Jesus without finding His

[1] In the *Excerpta* of Theodorus Lector, a writer of the sixth century, it is stated that Eudocia sent to Pulcheria from Jerusalem a portrait of the mother of God which had been painted by Saint Luke the apostle (PG. lxxxvi. 165). This is the earliest known mention of this portrait. The "Virgins of Saint Luke," whatever may be their true origin, represent a very ancient type and form an interesting study.

mother, or find His mother without penetrating to His heart? But must not he who would truly find Mary, follow her even to the foot of the cross? And was it not there that John found, as may all the righteous, the secrets of the mother and of the heart of Jesus.

John deserves the title of Evangelist of the Virgin, because of the incident on Calvary which he alone has recounted, and because of that other incident, important to the doctrine of Mary as mediatrix, of the miracle at Cana. In his work, taken as a whole, he is the "theologian," and as antiquity has named him, the most "divine" of the evangelists. This was, say the ancient fathers, because he had leaned upon the breast of Jesus and drawn from Him the secrets of heaven. It was, they say further, because the pure in heart see God; virgin, and child of the Virgin, John comprehended sooner than the others the divine mysteries. And, recalling the sojourn of Mary in John's house, they added: It is not astonishing that he has said greater things than the others, for "he had near him the treasury of celestial secrets."[1] Who knows whether Mary did not direct his attention towards what was most elevated in the Master's teaching: the relation between the Father and His eternal Word, the Word sent into the world to give us the truth, the light, and the life, the promise of the Eucharist, the last outpourings on the evening of the Last Supper? The disciples of that time preserved the teachings of their masters, by repeating them frequently, and reciting them

[1] St Ambrose: *de institutione virginis*, vii (PL. xvi. 318).

among themselves. And in the fourth Gospel we have the fruit of a memory which had long been exercised upon cherished recollections. They are faithfully reproduced, but after much contemplation so to speak. There are repetitions; the finest and most consoling phrases come like a refrain, just as, doubtless, the beloved disciple delighted to repeat them; he, and he alone among the sacred historians, always repeats the formula of affirmation, "Amen, amen"; and one would like to know whether Jesus spoke thus, or whether this reiteration expresses the ardent faith of the apostle, echoing the affirmation of Jesus after discovering by meditation its force and sublimity. May we not believe that what he thus wrote in his old age at Ephesus, as a doctrine studied with love for many years past and with which his soul was thoroughly imbued, was the same as that which, in his humble dwelling at Jerusalem, he had so often talked of with the mother of Jesus, that which she had taught him to understand and appreciate in its profoundest meaning?

John distinguished himself as an apostle by his zeal and his ardour, and we cannot imagine a feeble and languishing piety in this son of Mary. The repose upon Jesus' breast was a repose which fortified and prepared him for action. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, and while he dwelt with the Virgin, he was more than ever the "son of thunder," as Jesus had formerly named him and his brother James also. Throughout the first pages of the history of the Church, he takes a most important place. It is

only Peter, the head ordained by Jesus, who takes precedence of him.

The young apostle was thus closely connected with the principal incidents in the life of the Church. In seeing him act, in encouraging him to action, and also in stimulating the ardour of the other apostles who were all her sons, Mary followed with love the successes, the trials, and the development of Christ's work.[1]

One evening, when Peter, accompanied by John, went up to the Temple, he cured, near the "Gate Beautiful," a lame beggar who had never been able to walk. On hearing the report of this wonderful miracle—for the beggar and his infirmity were known to everyone—a crowd gathered together, and Peter preached to them, making a great number of conversions. But while he was talking to them, the military governor of the Temple appeared, and the two apostles were arrested and kept as prisoners during the night. The following day they were brought before the Sanhedrim, which forbade them to preach any more from that time forward in the name of Jesus. But they answered "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." And when they were set at liberty, "they went to their own company." John then returned to Mary, and we may well believe that she was there, joining in

[1] Concerning that which follows, see Acts iii-xii., in which will be found those quotations to which references are not given.

the prayer which rose from the hearts of the faithful, who gathered around the two witnesses for Jesus: ". . . Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus. . . ." As they finished their prayer the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled anew with the Holy Ghost, and they continued to preach the word of God with boldness. This incident, one of the first in the apostolic life, typically represented what the preaching of the faith would be, not only in the early Church, but to the very end of time: the gospel worker who goes about doing good and preaching the truth, the world which resists him, the invincible persistence of the conscience against human power, the prayer which beseeches strength, and the all-powerful grace which descends from above.

Not long after this, the authorities did more than threaten. The whole company of the twelve were arrested in the Temple, brought before the great Council, and suffered the Jewish scourging of thirty-nine strokes. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." It was with this pride that John returned to Mary, and, continues the sacred narrative, "daily in the temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

With the success of the apostolic preaching, the

persecution by the Jews increased. The number of the disciples and the poor who accompanied them, obliged them to institute the order of deacons, or to double the number of those already existing. Those who were elected to this office were remarkable for their zeal, and thus excited the anger of the Jews. Stephen, the chief among them, was stoned. Then they tried to arrest the progress of the faith of Christ by intimidation. The adherents of Judaism, with Saul (who was soon to be converted by a sudden act of mercy) at their head, devastated the Church, and entering into the houses, took men and women captive. At this time many disciples left Jerusalem, and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. But the apostles remained in the holy city. Mary therefore probably remained with them, teaching the faithful to glorify God for the triumph of Stephen, to stand firm in the midst of trials, and, as enjoined by her Son, to rejoice with gladness in this hour.

Those whom the storm had driven from Jerusalem actively propagated abroad the new faith. Thus Philip, the chief of the deacons after Stephen, preached and baptised in Samaria. The apostles appointed Peter and John to confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon these new members among the faithful. They prayed and laid their hands upon them, and the neophytes received the grace of the Holy Ghost. During the years that followed, John appears to have made other apostolic journeys. For, when Saint Paul came to Jerusalem three years after his conversion—consequently three years

or a little more, after the death of Stephen—he saw no other apostles besides Peter, and James "the Lord's brother."[1] It is quite possible that Mary had accompanied her adopted son, carrying to the newly won christians her sweet influence and the knowledge and love of her Jesus.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."[2] Between the persecution at the time when Stephen was martyred, and that of Herod Agrippa, approximately from the year 35 to 42, the Gospel was in the second of these stages foretold by Jesus. Proceeding mainly from Jerusalem it was spread in Judea, Samaria, and the neighbouring countries, but it had not yet been carried to the uttermost parts of the earth. Spain alone claims to have received, at that epoch, the preaching of James the Great, and, in spite of numerous objections, this claim is based upon probability. The people of Aragon add, that when the apostle was preaching the gospel in Saragossa, Mary, who was then still living, appeared in a vision to strengthen and encourage him. Though the visit of Saint James to Spain is not necessarily dependent upon the authenticity of this story, yet the story itself is necessarily connected with his visit. If it is true that the son of Zebedee left Judea on that distant expedition, it was because Jesus guided in an exceptional manner this one of His three chosen disciples, the brother of John, and he who was to be the first martyr among the twelve.

[1] Galatians i. 18, 19.

[2] Acts i. 8.

The apostolic band did not, as a whole, go far from Palestine where their work was abundantly blessed. Then for some years the churches had "rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. And . . . Peter passed through all quarters" of the faithful, visiting Christ's flock.

Mary could then rejoice in the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies and those of Jesus also. It was granted unto her to bless new sons, who soon became very numerous in this great family. For during that period of apostolic extension, just before or about the year 40, the Gentiles began to join the Church, and from two sides at the same time. First came Cornelius, the centurion of Cæsarea, who was admitted by Peter himself to the number of disciples. A little later, one of the wealthiest cities of all the East opened to receive the Gospel. Antioch had sheltered a certain number of apostolic workers who had been dispersed by the persecution which arose in the time of Stephen; and among these faithful ones were some, originally from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, speaking more boldly than the others, preached the glad tidings of the Gospel to the heathen. God blessed their zeal, and conversions were abundant among the Gentiles; Barnabas came from Jerusalem to visit the new church, bringing Paul to work with him; and it was there that the disciples first received the name of "christians."

Mary lived in all this life of the Church. She rejoiced to see the gathering of the first fruits which

announced the great harvest of souls. And when persecution attacked the shepherds and the flock, she was afflicted with a grief and maternal compassion, not incompatible with the joy in trials which was enjoined by the Lord. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" said Jesus, remonstrating at being pursued in the person of His chosen ones, and recalling that He is one with His brethren. And in the same way, Mary, mother of the Head and of the members, suffered in seeing her Son maltreated and disowned in His mystic body, as she had suffered when she saw Him maltreated and disowned in His divine Person. More than all, she suffered from the stubbornness of the persecution by the Sanhedrim, from the unbelief of Israel, and from the sin which abounded around her. If evil is so great an offence that God was willing to become man to suffer for it, and that He has always required the same from His own, Mary must, more than any other, have felt the bitterness of that pain.

Nevertheless, the peace and joy in the innermost depths of her soul, which never forsook Mary even during the darkest hours of the Passion, lived always in her heart. And, so far as we can conjecture, this disposition of happy serenity developed in her more and more. All suffering, even the most holy, even that ordained by God in this world, ceases when we enter the heavenly life. The mysteries of Providence, inscrutable, or but very imperfectly understood upon earth, will then be revealed; it will then be seen why God has permitted evil to exist, and

how from evil, He has brought forth good; the secrets of His grace, unsuspected here, will then be made known; it will be comprehended how He has caused grace to superabound over the abundance of evil, and that good is the final object of all His works; we shall acquiesce in all that His goodness has ordained, in all that His wisdom has permitted, in all that His power has accomplished; and finally we shall be lost in the love of the Creator, so admirable in all His works, and beyond His works so infinitely glorious and worthy to be loved.

These celestial views and thoughts had always been in a certain degree Mary's views and thoughts, and they were now more than ever hers. More and more she ascended into the light, losing herself in love; for, since the resurrection and ascension of her Son, her inner life had become more and more a heavenly life. Where her treasure was, there was her heart also. And if, in any christian soul, there is, in consequence of its union with Christ, a germ of glory and eternal peace, there was in Mary an abundant, and already almost beatific, participation in the glorious life of Jesus.

## CHAPTER XII

THE DEATH OF MARY (ABOUT THE YEAR 41 OR 42 ?)—THE ASSUMPTION—RELATIONS OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE FAITHFUL WITH MARY IN HEAVEN

MARY was soon to be where her thoughts and aspirations always dwelt. The measure of her holiness was full, a holiness which was beyond all human estimation. How, at that final end, one looks back to the Immaculate Conception; how one recalls the superabundance of that first grace, which was, however, only the starting point; how one sees again the path traversed since that dawn, a path like unto "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day";[1] how one thinks of the uninterrupted merit of all her acts throughout her life, up to the sanctification of her last years by the daily communion and that most solemn hour when the Holy Trinity absorbed, as it were, the soul of the mother of God; how one recalls the divine law of the increase of grace, how it is proportioned to the worthiness of the person and the intensity of the love, how "whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance,"[2] how, the greater is the store of heavenly riches, the more will it multiply, and how grace will increase in amazing

[1] Proverbs iv. 18.

[2] St Matthew xiii. 12.

proportion, inestimable beyond all measure, and as illimitable as the sea. To suggest some idea of this, eminent divines have imagined the grace of all the saints and all the angels gathered together in one, if that were possible, and they say that Mary in her last days, if not indeed much earlier, surpassed in her fulness of grace, all the outpourings of the divine bounty upon the whole multitude of the elect. Without exaggeration, they are right in speaking thus, for Mary by her close union with her Son, was placed on a higher level than either the saints or the angels; and moreover, it is possible to conceive grace growing without limit and ever increasing, since it is the participation in an infinite good, and in the life and the likeness of God.

The love which Mary bore within her, a love proportioned to the grace within her and the active agent in her marvellous development, appears to have been the means which God made use of to set her free from the bonds of the flesh. As she had never acquired original sin, she had not, like us, contracted the debt of death. Nevertheless, since Jesus Himself, without sinning, had taken upon Himself all the consequences of sin, and especially death, Mary must be like unto Him. Guiltless, she had, like her guiltless Son, endured all the evils of life. Like Him, she had to die, and again like Him, in order that she might console and encourage our weakness, she went before us through the valley of the shadow of death.

But it is the general opinion that she felt none of the feebleness of old age, and illness had no power

over the perfection of her virginal body. She died when it pleased God to call her, and in calling her, He only, so to speak, gave full scope to the ardour of her love. For the power of her love was a love even unto death. Her life was prolonged because God acted as He willed with His created being, and augmented as He pleased her power to love, just as at certain times He augmented her power to suffer. Further, Mary herself had control over all her desires, even the most holy, and it would appear that she was able to regulate the perceptible effects of her spiritual love. But when God, either suddenly, or rather by degrees, withdrew His extraordinary aid, and when by His consent Mary allowed the force and vehemence of her love to overflow more and more throughout all her being, her physical life was impaired, the organs became weaker, and the vessel of the flesh was broken so that the ardent flame might leap towards heaven.

It is not, however, necessary to suppose that she experienced violent ecstasies of love, such as the saints occasionally experienced. Mary's perfection was so great that, even in the region of similar phenomena, she greatly surpassed them all. In her, divine love was too entirely and too tranquilly dominant to cause any violent or abrupt action; she possessed her soul entirely and it grew without any obstruction; the life of her body was worn out not by repeated attacks of emotion, but by a strength steadfast and irresistible in its suavity.

And when that all-powerful fervency, weakening the body towards the end, had finally stretched

Mary upon the couch on which she would die,[1] the last bond was broken without any effort. Sorrow, agony, and martyrdom, all these she had already endured with Jesus; her last hour was a sweet slumber, a transition, a rapture. Apostles and holy women must have watched the mother, who but now was speaking to them and blessing them, wrapped in the silence of holy meditation, with her gaze fixed upon heaven, perhaps upon the actual vision of her Son. And imperceptibly, with a last smile, the soul quitted the sacred body without disturbing its unchangeable peace. "Charity never faileth."[2] The Virgin passed from earth to heaven without any interruption in the continuity of her love; but now she loves in the light without shadow, in the vision face to face, in a glory equal to her fulness of grace, in the eternal and ever blessed possession of her God.

There is no well authenticated document, nor any uniform and indisputable tradition concerning that last "sleep."[3] According to some, Mary had been

[1] Did Mary, who was the pattern of the christian life, receive extreme unction? The question is disputed. It is quite clear that she could not, like us, receive it as a remedy for sin. But extreme unction is also a divinely instituted means of augmenting the grace of the righteous and of sanctifying their death; and there was also the good example to be set. These considerations are sufficient to render the affirmative opinion tenable.

[2] 1 Corinthians xiii. 8.

[3] The bodily Assumption (see further on) remains certain and incontestable. The age at which the Holy Virgin died, and consequently the date of her death, is very variously indicated by ancient writers. As to the circumstances which accompanied her "transition," we have very detailed accounts, but we cannot

in the world about fifty-nine years, according to others, sixty-three, while others say seventy-two or even more. She must then have died either in the year 42, or 48, or 52, or about those years, or even at a still later date. If one must choose among such diverse opinions, the first of these dates, the

place entire confidence in them. For the most ancient writings in which these narrations are found, the most ancient at least that have been preserved, belong to that category of works, so much studied at the present day, which are called apocryphal, works which have been falsely attributed to the apostles, or to authors of a very early period. Tischendorf has published (*Apocalypses apocryphæ*, 1866) three versions of the account of the death of Mary. Many others concerning the same subject, in all languages, have been published since.

Among these works we may quote: The book "of the Dormition of Mary," which goes under the name of Saint John the Evangelist; the book "of the Transition of Mary," attributed to Saint Melito of Sardis (and it seems that in the time of Saint Melito, that is to say in the second century, there may actually have been a first recension of the work); some narratives attributed to Evodius, successor to Saint Peter in the see of Antioch (certain scholars support the authenticity of a fragment of Evodius); some passages in the Dionysian writings (one knows, of course, that these writings are generally regarded as later, by several centuries, than the time of Saint Dionysius; as to the Areopagite himself, his conversion took place after the year 50, and so, probably, after the death of Mary). Several of the oriental Fathers and church historians have certainly drawn from these sources, the historical basis of which is far from being free from additions. If they have also made use of more trustworthy documents, and this is quite possible, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the parts which have been taken from them, and to draw the line with any certainty between history and legend. The value of the "Euthymiaca Historia" quoted by Saint John of Damascus at the end of his second sermon upon the Assumption (PG. xcvi. 748) is also a matter of debate; but, in any case, this history is not earlier than the end of the fifth century.

year 42 or thereabouts, has perhaps a little more probability than the others. Perhaps it may even reconcile apparent differences of opinion; for, according to the method of reckoning, the starting points of which remain doubtful, we find that Mary, in the year 42, was fifty-nine years old, or, rather, a little more than sixty, and possibly sixty-three.

Furthermore this year 42, according to trustworthy calculation, was the year of the general dispersion of the apostles. Twelve years, almost thirteen, had passed since the departure of the Master; it was the limit which seems to have been fixed upon in which to offer first to the Jews the grace of the Gospel;[1] and, towards the Feast of the Passover in the year 42, Herod Agrippa the new king of the country, by beheading James, imprisoning Peter, and persecuting the Church, obliged the pastors to take flight, and to carry into far countries the light of the faith. It was, in fact, the same year which has been regarded as the year in which Peter, freed from his bonds, made his first appearance in Rome. If, then, Our Lady died in the midst of the assembled apostles, as tradition appears to have preserved the remembrance, and if we seek to explain that gathering in a natural manner, her death must be placed before the Feast of the Passover in the year 42. The Church of France formerly kept the Feast of the Assumption

[1] An ancient tradition. See, Clement of Alexandria: *Stromates*, VI. v. (PG. ix. 264); Apollonius (end of the second century) quoted by Eusebius: *historia ecclesiastica*, v. 18 (PG. xx. 480); *Acta Petri cum Simone ex codice Vercellensi*, v., in Lipsius: *acta apocrypha*, t. i. p. 49.

about the middle of January; and if the date of this feast has any value in indicating that of the event, we might place the date of Mary's death in January, 42; but if the commonly accepted date, 15th of August, be taken, she must have died in August of the year 41.

As to the other circumstances, the principal details, as they are related by the old writers, may be thus epitomized. The details vary very much, according to the different texts and their various editions. After an angel, carrying a palm branch, had come to announce to Mary her coming deliverance, the apostles suddenly assembled round her—brought miraculously upon the clouds of the sky, say a large number of the texts. In the midst of the band of disciples and holy women, Christ Himself appeared, surrounded by a multitude of angels. In accordance with Mary's own request, He promised that at all times and in all places, whosoever should pray to her and make a request in her name should find grace and mercy with God. The Virgin blessed the faithful, who all honoured her as their mother, and she committed her soul to Jesus. The hymns of the disciples mingled with the songs of the angels; numberless miracles were performed to punish the perverse Jews and to console those who believed; the sacred body was deposited in a tomb near the Garden of Olives at Gethsemane, in the valley of Jehoshaphat. The song of the angels was continued round the tomb, and was heard for three days after. Finally, the glorifying of Mary's body was manifested to the apostles. It was Jesus

Himself who, appearing again before them, raised His mother from the dead; or rather it was Thomas who, returning from India only after the burial, saw at the moment of his arrival, the Virgin ascend to heaven, and announced to the others her Assumption; or at least, it was the late arrival of Thomas which gave occasion for opening the tomb, and for the consequent discovery that it was empty.

Who shall say where history ends and where legendary additions commence? In any case, however legendary and uncertain a great part of it may be, we may be sure that a foundation of historic truth lies hidden under these ancient narratives, and a foundation of theological truth also. From the most distant period these theological truths have made a part of the christian belief; and it is thus that they have found their way into the apocryphal books, the compilers of which were often not very scholarly, and sometimes even untrustworthy,[1] but who have preserved for us the current ideas of their times. It is because of these truths that the more learned writers and orators, historians and Fathers of the Church, have largely accepted these accounts and sometimes the legends. And whilst repeated from age to age, the words of the Fathers, powerless to give historical value to legend, add at least a substantial guarantee to the truths which concern the dogma and also the idea which we must have of Mary. We find there besides, in addition to the

[1] The book entitled "The Transition of Mary" is condemned in the Gelasian catalogue of apocryphal books (about the year 500).

details of history, that which they professed and claimed to preach; and in that domain they have weight and authority.

Among these true ideas, which belong to catholic tradition, we may note the maternal relations of Mary with the faithful, the eagerness of Jesus to introduce into His heaven her who had introduced Him into this world, and the consolation left to the Church in her heavenly protection and her all-powerful intercession. We should especially note the fact, which belongs both to history and to dogma, of Mary's resurrection and of her entire glorifying both in body and soul.

In spite of the rarity of very ancient writings in which the Assumption is explicitly mentioned, several indications cause us to think that if it was not known by all or in all countries with equal clearness, the remembrance of it was, however, never lost. If popular imagination developed and embellished the narration, it is because the memory of it was regarded as an important fact. As for the marvellous stories, these would help to render the remembrance more notable, but we can see also that in certain places and at certain times they would give rise to doubts, and obscure the truth of which they were the disputable guarantee.

The substantial basis of tradition which had preceded the legends and which continued to exist independently of them, testifies to the wide and ancient observance of the feast. For the Assumption was honoured from the sixth century, and perhaps even much earlier, not only in eastern countries,

but also in the West, which is much less open to belief in legends. It is not certain that the feast did not exist at Rome, even at the time when Rome rejected the apocryphal books, that is to say, towards the end of the fifth century or at the beginning of the sixth; and during the seventh century it certainly was celebrated there. Further, antiquity has never professed to possess any relics of the Holy Virgin; and when what is claimed to be her tomb is shown at Jerusalem, it is always pointed out that it is empty. And further, the very words handed down by the old christian writers, to designate the death and glorifying of Mary, have something special and peculiar; they speak of her alone, or they refer to her with a particular shade of difference which distinguishes her from other saints. They speak only of her "sleep," of her "repose," of her "transition" from earth to heaven, and finally of the "Assumption" of her whom God her Son has bodily taken to Himself. All this appears to demonstrate that the resurrection of Mary has always been remembered, recounted doubtless in the beginning by the apostles or by those of the apostles and disciples who knew of it.

Nevertheless, the presumption of an explicit, uninterrupted tradition does not appear to be the firmest foundation upon which the Church builds the certainty of her belief. The rank and dignity of Mary are much stronger reasons for this. Among the great number of arguments which may readily be advanced upon this subject, several indicate only simple suitability; but others—for which a special work would be necessary to set out and demon-

strate their full force—make us feel that the privilege of the Assumption was an absolute necessity. For they show it to be the logical outcome of other privileges already known, or that it is implicitly contained in those privileges, and in the whole work which Jesus Christ gave to His mother to perform. And as this work and the other privileges were revealed by God, serious thinkers believe that the Assumption also rests upon divine revelation, that it is part of the trust confided to the Church, and that it should therefore become the subject of dogmatic definition.

Everything concerning Mary is opposed to the idea of the decomposition of the tomb, everything seems to require incorruption and life. Her incomparable purity, and the absolute innocence of her soul claimed the preservation of her body; and it was not only her virginity preserved in her maternity which demanded that her flesh should remain untouched by death. There was also the special and unique love of Christ for His mother which would not permit Him to leave her to await a far off resurrection. So close was the bond that united them, that "the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary."[1]

The Eucharist gives the christian a claim to rise again at the last day because his body is united to the body of Christ. But did not the mother and

[1] This phrase, frequently repeated, is found (for the first time?) in the treatise upon the Assumption, composed probably about the time of Charlemagne, which has often been attributed to Saint Augustine (PL. xl. 1145).

Son become of the same flesh in quite another manner at the Incarnation? And is there not in this a more pressing claim to resurrection, or rather a kind of impossibility of remaining in death? "She, most truly and entirely blessed . . . How can death destroy her who was entirely united to God? How should hell receive her? How should corruption dare to touch the body which has received the Life? All these ideas are contrary and in every way foreign to the soul and the body of her who has borne her God."[1]

The privilege of the Immaculate Conception, considered by itself, makes it certain that in relation to death, Mary was in a different position to us. For in the usual order of things, we are assured by revelation that death is the punishment which justly follows original sin. To the innocence preserved by the first man, the preservation of life must correspond; while death corresponded to his sin; as his sin was transmitted to his descendants, so must death be transmitted in like manner. Therefore to whomsoever the hereditary sin has not been transmitted, the law of death cannot apply. Consequently Mary's death was for other reasons than those under which the rest of mankind suffered death. She was like Jesus, who without inheriting sin, accepted the physical consequences and pains of it. But then must she not even to the end be compared with Him; to be in death like Him and not as the rest of mankind; to succumb for an

[1] St John of Damascus: *homilia ii in dormitionem B.V. Mariæ*, 3 (PG. xcvi. 728).

instant, only to be raised again soon after? It is true that Jesus is the heavenly Redeemer, and that Mary is numbered among the redeemed. But even to this we may answer that as she was redeemed in a peculiar and more exalted manner than the rest of mankind, so it is due to her to be freed from death in a peculiar and more exalted manner also. For Jesus redeems at the same time from death and from sin; as He redeems from sin, so He redeems from death. To others redemption comes as a deliverer, freeing them from evils they have already experienced; from sin, after its marks have been traced upon the soul; from death, after the body has been reduced to dust. But to Mary redemption came as a preserver, which prevented her from ever being stained by sin or vanquished by death; if it did not exempt her from passing, like Jesus, through death itself, it at least exempted her from all the consequences of death, and soon brought her back again to life untouched by the tomb.

In considering from a wider point of view what is peculiar to Mary in the harmony of the divine plan, we see in her the woman blessed among women, who reaps as many blessings as the first woman brought down curses upon herself and upon her race; the woman promised and given for the purpose of repairing, with the Saviour, the fault of the first human pair; the new Eve, set apart from the rest of mankind and associated with the Redeemer in His victory, as the first Eve had been associated with the fault of Adam the sinner. The

fall in Eden and the curses then brought down by Eve placed the whole human race under the dominion of Satan, of sin, of concupiscence, and of death. Mary must therefore, by special blessings and by a special victory, triumph over Satan, over concupiscence, over sin, and also over death. And indeed we see that, united to the Redeemer, she has vanquished with Him and by Him, Satan, concupiscence, and sin; she has vanquished them not only as we all vanquish, or ought to vanquish them, but in a quite exceptional manner, and by a victory like that of Jesus Christ. Must she not logically have also vanquished "the last enemy which is death,[1] and have vanquished it not as the multitude of the righteous, but after the manner of Jesus Himself? Every man shall be raised from the dead "in his own order." And Christ's order is to be the "firstfruits"[2] of the resurrection. Mary's order in all things is to be set apart from the multitude and placed near Jesus; it was therefore by an earlier resurrection that she must triumph with Him.

> Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,
> Leaning upon her beloved?[3]

The victorious group, foreseen from the beginning of the world, its work accomplished, enters into its eternal rest. Above the desert of this world, into the midst of the joy and feast of the angels, Mary is exalted in her living and risen body; she is exalted, leaning upon her Well-beloved, for from Him alone

[1] 1 Corinthians xv. 26. [2] *Ibid.* xv. 23.
[3] Solomon's Song viii. 5.

she has received her grace, her merit, all her greatness; inseparable from Him in the divine thought she is exalted with Him, gently drawn by Him. And, when Jesus elevated her to where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, He crowned her in the presence of His saints and angels. He crowned her as her God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He rewarded with an over-flowing measure of glory and beatitude, the over-flowing measure of grace which she had received, and with full participation in all the gifts of heaven. He crowned her with a Son's heart; as she had formerly received Him in her earthly dwelling at Nazareth or at Bethlehem, so He now received her in His dwelling, in the eternal glory of His Father in heaven. He crowned her in all His majesty as King, not with one of those crowns which He has reserved for His most faithful servants, but with the diadem of royalty. For her claim of mother elevates her above all subjects, and associates her with the almighty power of her Son; since foreordained with Him to accomplish that marvellous Incarnation, which is the crown of all created work, she must have dominion with Him over all creation; for co-operating with the Word in the acquisition of grace, she must have part in His reign over the spiritual world, to which the natural world is entirely subordinate.

The human souls which already peopled paradise, the faithful through long ages of waiting, and the first elect of the christian Church, saluted in Mary the honour and the redemptress of our race. Her earthly relatives, Anne, Joachim, and Joseph, felt

their beatitude increase with all the brilliance of her triumph. The angels reverence the supreme dignity of the mother of their God; and since they also have probably received grace and glory through Christ, they too honour as their mother her who has given Christ to them. All, both saints and angels, who, in each of the inhabitants of heaven, saw and praised God, contemplated in Mary a more brilliant radiance of majesty, a new splendour of beauty, a hitherto unknown pouring forth of sovereign goodness, and in her, more than in themselves and more than in all the multitude of them, they loved the supreme love. And, in the midst of these splendours, Mary, always grateful and humble, glorified the Lord, thrilled with gladness in Jesus, and uniting the whole worship of heaven and ascribing it to Him who is all in all, she sang with the countless multitude of the blessed: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost!"

Fifty years after Mary's departure, John, her well-beloved and the well-beloved of Jesus, was still upon earth. Of all the apostolic band he alone had survived, had preached the Gospel in Asia, and had grown old in the labour and struggle of spreading the Gospel. Domitian, the persecutor who succeeded Nero, had banished him to Patmos, an island of barren rocks. While there he received divine consolation; the revelation, by mysterious symbols, of the warfare and victories of the Church, up to the final triumph of the Second Coming. And suddenly, in one of the visions which were vouchsafed to him,

he saw again the mother whom Jesus had given to him :

"And there appeared a great wonder in heaven ; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." [1]

Soon however, to characteristics which appear to belong to Mary herself, are added others which could not be applied to her. The mysterious woman is in the sorrows of child-birth ; before her is a dragon, who is the old serpent, eager to devour the child which she is about to bring into the world. And when the monster had been frustrated in his design and cast out of heaven, the struggle continued upon earth ; the woman fled into the wilderness, and the dragon pursued her and fought against her race.

It was, therefore, the Church, often symbolised among the early christians under the metaphor of a woman, which was the direct object of Saint John's vision. But Mary is no more absent from the vision than she is from the Church ; everything speaks of her, and consequently recalls her. The mother of Jesus is, in various aspects, the chief member, the queen, the mother, the ideal type of the Church. The Church, mother and virgin also, "imitates the mother of Christ." [2] If she bring forth christians who follow the pattern of Jesus, she is following

[1] Revelation xii., see the whole chapter, and also the commentary upon it by J. B. Terrien in *La mère de Dieu et la mère des hommes*, book VIII. chap. iii. t. IV. p. 59-85. We must be content here with a very rapid sketch.

[2] St Augustine : *de sancta virginitate*, ii. (PL. xl. 397). See also chapter vi. of the same treatise.

the example of the mother of God; if the dragon is there, full of rage against her and against her offspring, it is because Satan includes her in the hate that he has vowed, perhaps since the day of his downfall, against the incarnate Word and His mother; if she struggle against the old serpent, it is because she continues throughout the history of the world, that struggle of which the victory of Christ and Mary marked the central point. In a word, the symbolic person which Saint John saw descend from heaven to earth, reminds us in everything of another, who henceforth abides in the highest heaven in unassailable peace; she represents to us Mary, clothed with the sun by her incomparable union with the Divinity, having the moon under her feet as a symbol of the lower and changing world which she has despised and vanquished, and crowned, as with radiant stars, by the multitude of the saints.[1]

As it was in the vision of Patmos, so it is in the reality. The Church which labours and struggles on earth, remains in dependence upon Mary and under her sweet influence, the queen and heavenly mediatrix at the side of Jesus. Jesus is the sun, the source of life and light; and the woman

[1] It may be questioned whether Mary is not directly referred to in the verse which precedes the vision of the woman (xi. 19): "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament. . . ." If this interpretation, which has sometimes been suggested but without being thoroughly examined, were permissible, Mary would be the ark of the testament dwelling in the sanctuary of heaven, and from thence she would, so to say, illuminate her likeness, the Church, which is seen in the heavens below.

clothed with the sun, while she is bathed in its splendour, reflects upon the earth its heat and radiance. Living in the glory of Jesus, she presides, after Him and with Him, in a rank superior to that of the whole Church triumphant, and in a higher order than the life of faith, love, and holy works, which is that of the Church here below.

The Church lives by faith, by unceasing meditation upon the teaching received by divine revelation, by sounding its depths, by contemplating its various aspects, and by developing and separating one by one the truths which from the beginning have been implicitly preserved in it. And during the course of this prolonged labour, one of the first and principal objects of christian thought has been the mission, the greatness, and the privileges of Mary. We could not have had such a knowledge of Jesus unless we had known His mother well. The heresies concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation have been summarily condemned, and the truth upon these fundamental points briefly enunciated by the formula of Ephesus: "The Holy Virgin is the mother of God, since she has bodily brought forth the Word, born of God, which is made flesh."[1] Besides this, other prerogatives revealed by God and connected with the divine motherhood have been solemnly recog nised and demonstrated: her perpetual virginity, her power of intercession, her immunity from all, even the slightest sin. Some have doubted whether this preservation from transgression extended as far as original sin; but the main body of pastors and of the

[1] Denzinger: *Enchiridion symbolorum ac definitionum*, 73.

faithful have always believed it; the more we reflect on it, the more we see in this a singularly glorious privilege for Mary, necessarily comprised in the idea of her which God has given us, and important to be affirmed; it has now been confirmed by infallible authority, and we rejoice in the pronouncement as a signal victory.

In addition to those solemn decisions which are declared from time to time, the Church is daily occupied, through the ordinary teaching of its pastors, in making Mary known. It shows in her the woman blessed above all others, by whom came Jesus and with Him all blessings; and this last idea is clearly brought out. We see better day by day that Mary's co-operation in the divine work has a universal influence upon the whole spiritual order of things, and upon each of the graces that God has given us. She has helped, by her concurrence in the redeeming mysteries, to acquire all those graces for us; and consequently she must still help in bestowing them upon us. For God, from whom are gifts without repentance,[1] has not changed the law which He Himself has established. The three wills which it pleased Him to unite on the day of the Annunciation and at Calvary must still be united in heaven. The Father bestows and confers all grace; the Son, "able also to save them to the utter-

[1] Romans xi. 29. "God having once desired to give us Jesus Christ by the Holy Virgin, the gifts of God are without repentance, and this never changes. . ." Bossuet: *Sermon on the Immaculate Conception* (1669), ed. Lebarq, t. v., p. 609; see the whole context. Bossuet returns to the same idea on other occasions.

most that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them,"[1] is by His prayers and infinite merits the universal and necessary Mediator; and, dwelling near Him, Mary also exercises her mediation; a mediation which is not, absolutely and in strict justice, necessary as is that of Jesus, but which the divine goodness, mercy, and wisdom have for ever established and whose object is universal. Mary offers her merits acquired for us; above all, she offers those of Jesus and presents them acceptably by her all powerful prayer. And no grace descends upon the earth which is not dependent on her love and intercession.

This truth appears to be implicitly contained, not only in the dogma, but also in the worship of the Church. Worship, and especially public worship, is the outward expression of belief; in the manifestation of our respect and confidence, in our acts of reverence and invocation, we conform to the various means which connect us with God, with the Holy Virgin, and with the saints. And the special manner in which the Church honours and prays to the mother of God, exactly expresses her pre-eminent dignity, and corresponds to the rank which she occupies above saints and angels. To God alone belongs "latria," or adoration properly so-called, for He is the only Creator and the only Almighty. To angels and saints belongs the inferior worship or "dulia," for they are princes of the heavenly court, and we recognise ourselves as their servants and dependants. To Mary, and to her alone, belongs the

[1] Hebrews vii. 25.

worship "hyperdulia," that is to say, a superior worship to that of the other saints and of the angels, and this because of the divine motherhood which has given her a particular affinity with God. To her then must be paid the greatest honour; upon her must we place the most entire and absolute dependence; to her must ascend the most frequent prayers, most sure of being granted. And one of the characteristics of this worship of Mary is that we honour and invoke her, at least by some memory or some mention, not only on certain days or on special occasions, but always, and in every part of the divine office. The eyes of the Church are always raised towards her, recognising by this her limitless power and universal mediation.

From the doctrine and preaching of the pastors, from the teaching of christian leaders, from the communities filled with the spirit of the faith, the faithful draw the true idea of Mary and the sentiments which they must entertain towards her. She is the mother of God, the queen of the world, the all holy, and by these titles she is worthy of all respect and of all honour. She is the pattern of all the virtues, and her example encourages more especially purity without stain, humility, and love towards God and man. She is the mother, the mother of Jesus whom the child learns to know by seeing Him represented in her arms; the mother of Christ's brethren by that more than earthly motherhood before which all christian mothers bow themselves and teach their children to bow. Mother of Jesus and our mother, she is worthy of the most

filial love. Compassionate to the sorrows of her children on earth, and influencing the heart of her Son in heaven, she deserves and inspires a confidence which, as witnessed through all ages, has never been deceived. Was that beautiful phrase, "the all-powerful suppliant," first applied to Mary or to prayer? It is never verified concerning the one except in relation to the other, and in christian language it may be applied equally to both.

For nearly nineteen centuries the queen of heaven has never ceased to respond to the prayers and worship from earth by her protection and benefits. Taught by a long experience, the Church has named her its defence and succour. For Mary has protected it from its outside foes. We can call to remembrance those great days in which she gave victory to the christian armies, or, after a severe storm, restored peace and the pontiff-king to Rome. Mary has defended the Church against the enemies of the faith; she triumphs over heresies, and she does this because the true doctrine concerning her person and her position establishes the true doctrine of Jesus Christ and His mission, and because she places spiritual weapons in the hands of the faithful, by which error is vanquished. But beyond all else she aids the Church in doing its own special work, which is the saving and sanctifying of souls. Her beneficent intervention has many times been shown in raising up scholars to teach the truth, preachers who declare it to the multitude, and apostles who carry it to yet other nations. The shepherds of souls, whether in christian lands or in

distant missions, have seen their work blessed when they have implored her aid to revive the faith in their people or to bring those who were still in heathen darkness to the knowledge of Jesus. There is no religious order which does not celebrate the part which she has taken in its foundation, and the care with which she has always surrounded it. And who can tell what devotion and godliness she has inspired by visions of herself, and with what encouragement and constant favour she has sustained the fervour of the faithful ?

The mother of all men, she is ever ready to help them and never refuses to assist them in their earthly troubles, thus winning their hearts by her goodness so that she may bring them to God. She delights in being called "the mother of mercy"; she is the advocate of "poor sinners," that is to say, of those who feel their misery and desire to rise from it; to these, she, the all holy, never refuses to hold forth a helping hand. To christians who faithfully honour and pray to her, she assists to innocent life, perseverance in good works, and finally, heaven. Upon those who turn in filial devotion towards her every day, who more fully give themselves to her, who surrender their souls to her influence, she bestows her choicest gifts; a purity more like her own, an inclination to holiness, and a familiar knowledge and intimate love of Jesus.

Here below, we lead a life of faith, believing in mysteries which, without contradicting it, pass beyond our reason, hoping for a happiness of which we have had no experience, loving a God whom we

have never seen. We live in spirit in all these great realities of the spiritual world, of which nothing material reveals to us its existence or brings us into contact with it. This is the natural law. Yet, nevertheless, from time to time, and in exceptional circumstances, the veil becomes transparent. It may be a miracle, which points out as by the touch of a finger, an intervention from on high; it may be a joy of the soul which makes us conscious of the work of a superior agent; it is sometimes by the vision of a celestial being. Our Lady loves to make these exceptions. Our own day has, less than any other, a right to deny her visions and her miracles. Happy are those privileged ones who in themselves have experienced her presence and her benefits! But does not Mary desire to make it known to each one that she is the mother of all, that she lives in heaven, and that she thinks of her children?

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